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Peasants' Revolt
or medieval military coup?

Revealed: the true identity of the rebels of 1381

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A social history of slimming clubs

Henry VII: the greatest pretender

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MAY 2021

Who were the rebels of 1381? Though the uprising is popularly known as the **Peasants' Revolt**, historians have long been aware that it encompassed a broader swathe of the population than just rural labourers. Now, a new research project has revealed that a sizeable proportion of the rebels had a military background. In their cover feature, on page 20, the project team consider how their evidence should change our understanding of one of the defining events of England's medieval history.

One of the defining events of recent years has been Britain's departure from the European Union, and plans have long been afoot to mark the occasion with a Festival of Brexit. What this will entail remains somewhat unclear, but the organisers might well take inspiration from another great national celebration: the **1951 Festival of Britain**. As we reach the 70th anniversary of an event that attracted millions of visitors from across the country, Harriet Atkinson explains how the roots of this patriotic extravaganza were far more international than we might expect. You'll find that on page 50.

It's now been **more than a year since Britain went into lockdown** and we started producing the magazine from our homes. It's been a challenging time in lots of ways – as I'm sure it has for many of you – but we've been greatly encouraged by our loyal, enthusiastic and hugely knowledgeable readership. Thanks for all your support and correspondence over the past year. Better times ahead!

Rob Attar
Editor

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Nathen Amin
Henry VII came to the throne an unknown, and fought throughout his reign to keep hold of the crown he had usurped. If he had failed, there would have been no Henry VIII or Elizabeth I.
Nathen looks at Henry VII's battles with rival claimants to his throne **on page 36**

Helen Carr
John of Gaunt was a man central to English and European politics in the 14th century. He was at the very forefront of the dynastic ambitions of the Plantagenets.
Helen chronicles John of Gaunt's audacious bid to seize the throne of Castile **on page 63**

Harriet Atkinson
I became interested in the Festival of Britain in the year 2000, when people regularly drew comparisons with the newly opened Millennium Dome, and I started to question why governments back mega cultural projects like these.
Harriet explores the international roots of 1951's Festival of Britain **on page 50**

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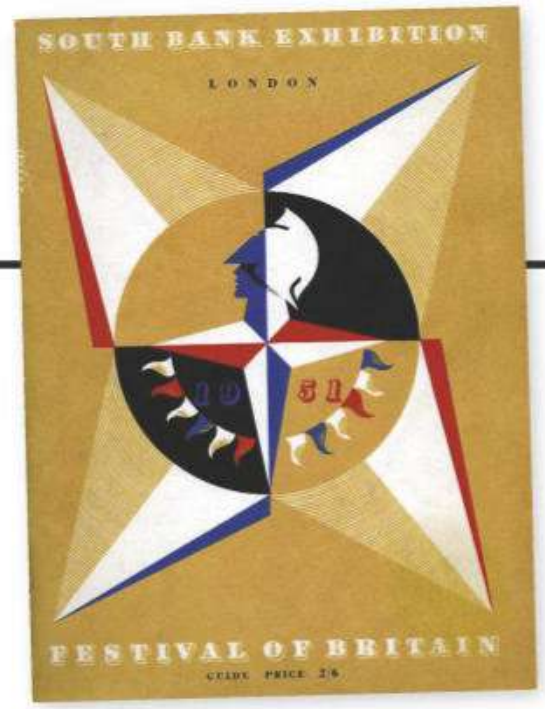

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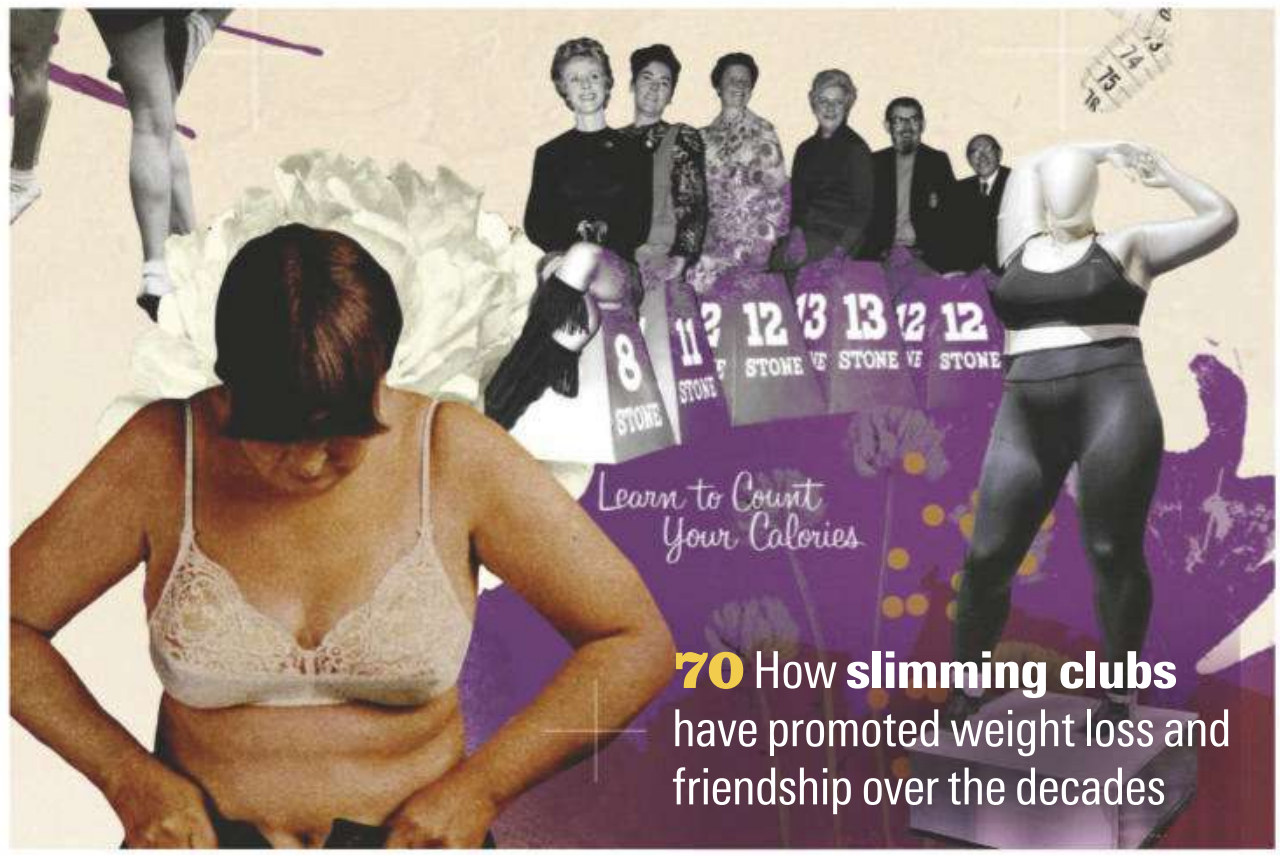

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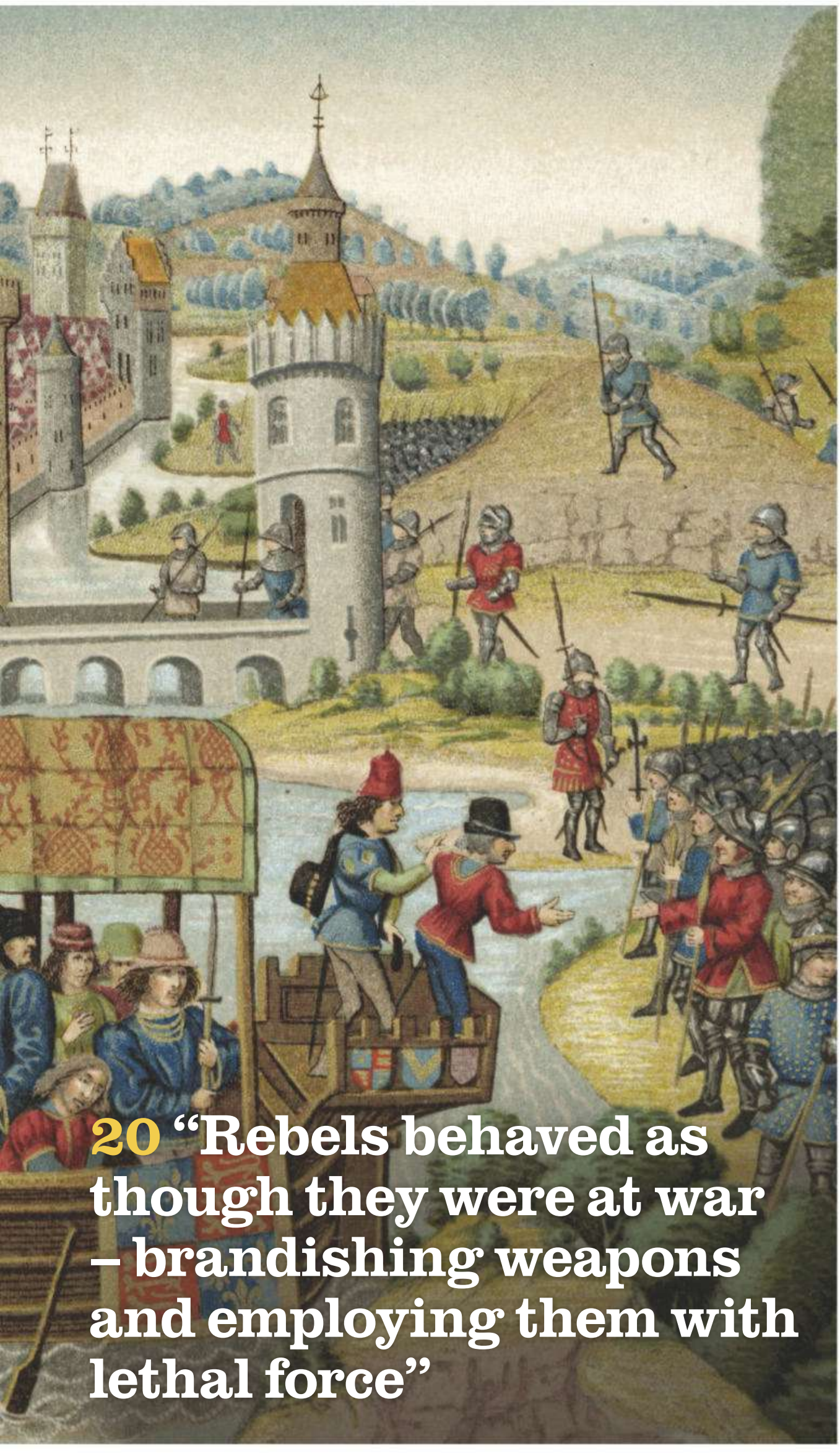

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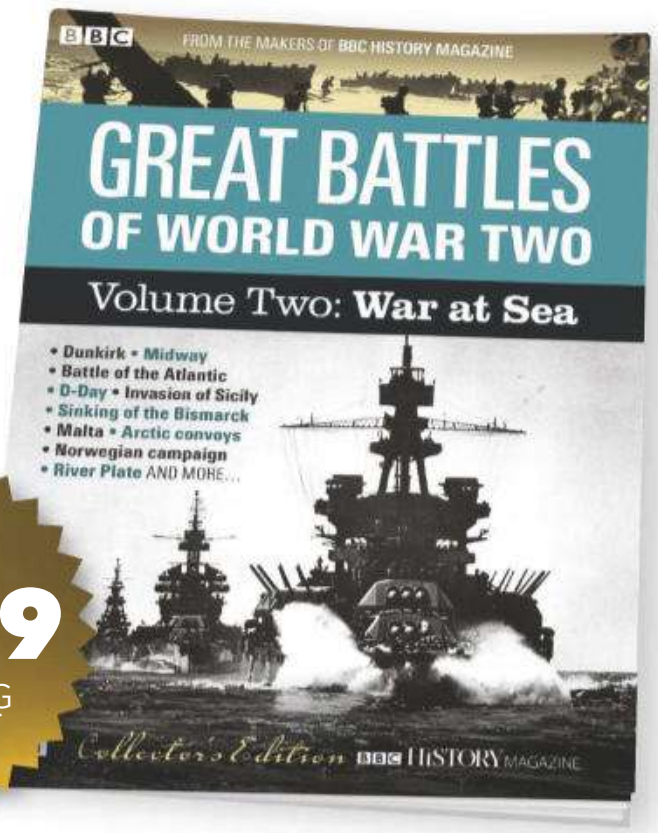
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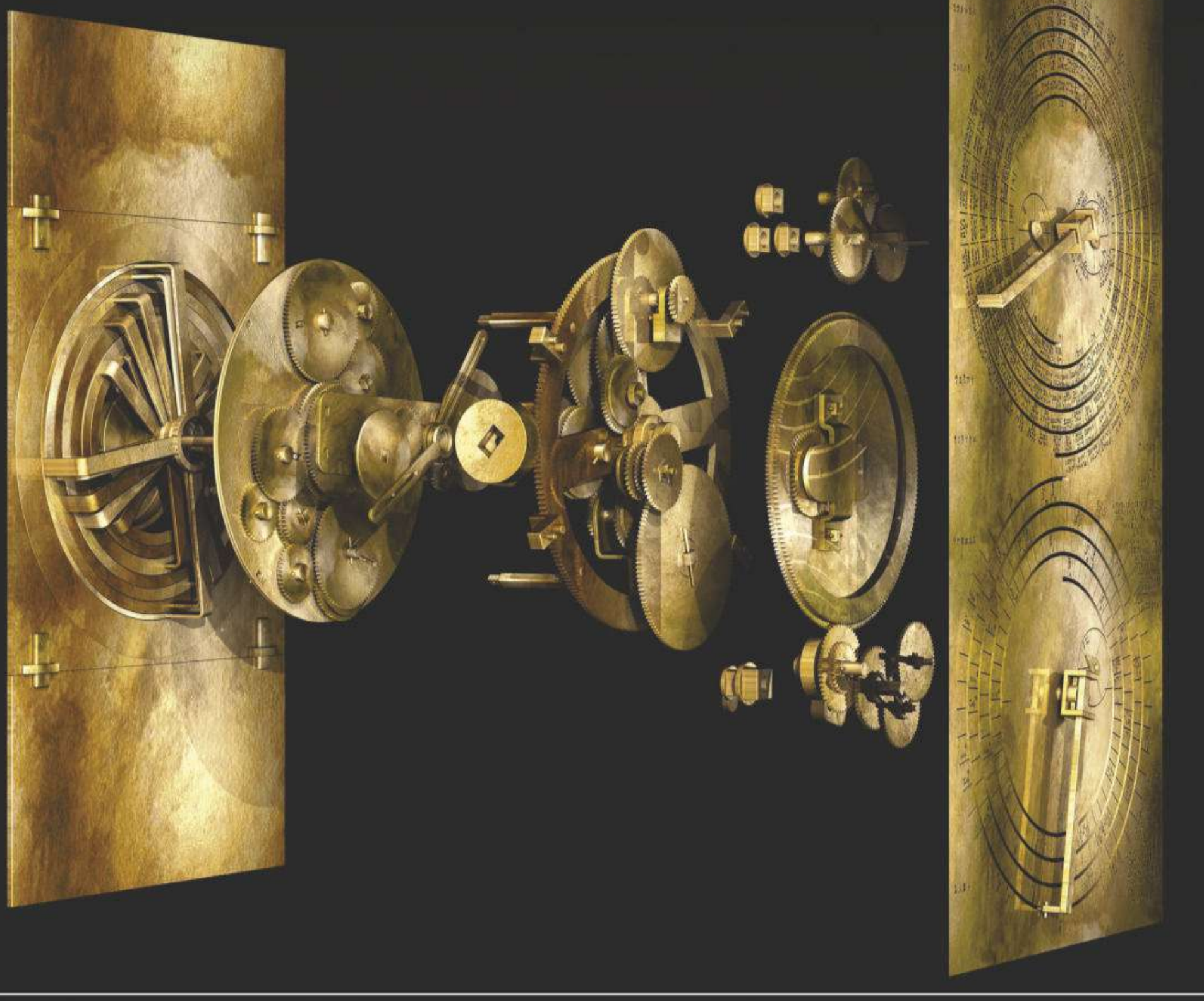
THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

EYE-OPENER

Computer reboot

This 3D rendering depicts a 2,000-year-old device, complete with an intricate gear system, which is thought to be the world's oldest analogue "computer". The Antikythera Mechanism was first unearthed in a shipwreck in 1901 and is named after the Greek island off whose coast it was found. It has long been known that the device was used to predict eclipses and the paths of astral bodies, but the new virtual reconstruction has offered fresh insights into how it worked.

Experts at University College London studied the work of previous scholars and inscriptions on the 34cm-high "computer" to piece together more than 80 separate fragments of the device. Although previous attempts to recreate the artefact have failed, partly due to the fact that around two-thirds of its mechanism is missing, researchers hope the modelling will allow them to create a full-scale replica for the first time.



EXPLODED MODEL OF THE COSMOS GEARING OF THE ANTIKYTHERA MECHANISM. ©2020 TONY FREETH.

Have a story? Please email Matt Elton at matt.elton@immediate.co.uk

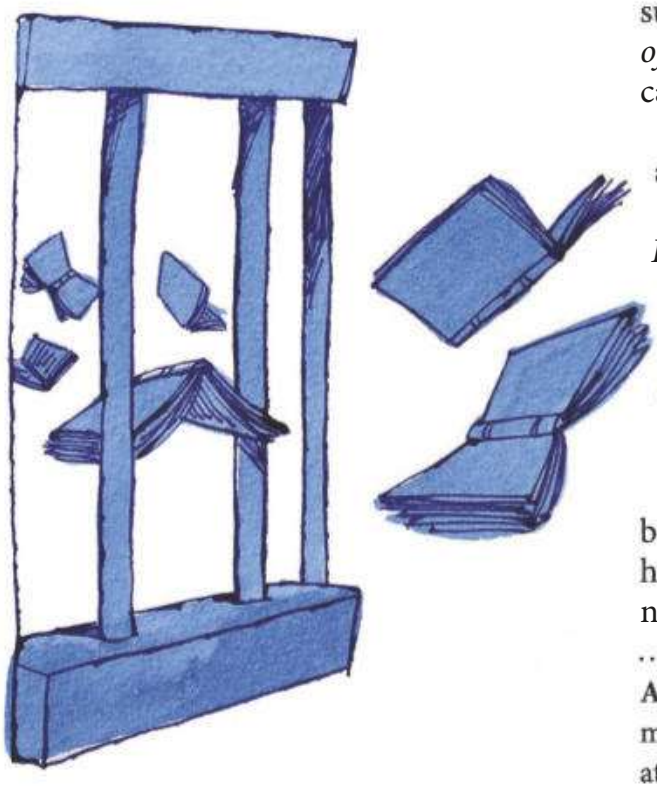
TALKING POINTS
Unlocking history

Twitter users recently offered their suggestions for history books to appeal to Britain's prisoners – with pleasingly diverse results. **ANNA WHITELOCK** kept a keen eye on proceedings

Historian and TV presenter **Dan Snow** (@the historyguy) recently turned to Twitter with a request. "I have been asked to recommend history books for prisoners in the UK," he wrote. "Can you recommend please?" The resulting conversation yielded an interesting mix of suggestions well worth a read for anyone.

Nigel Baker (@NigelMBaker1) suggested children's historical novelist Ronald Welch. "His books cover a broad period of history, include saints and sinners, are well written and you can learn a lot," he wrote. **Philip** (@HArrisonPE) added: "Tom Holland is fairly accessible. James Hawes' *The Shortest History of Germany* is good too. Stephen Fry's Greek mythology series is great."

Nikki Carter (@CartnerNI) offered the perspective of a history teacher, noting that "My students find Robert Service, Simon Sebag Montefiore and Simon Schama accessible. The Osprey Publishing series on wars is great, and the Access to History series [from Hodder Education] is good too. Short and easy." **Alison Kershaw** (@Alikersh) nominated a firm favourite of mine, *A Million Years in a Day: A Curious History of Daily Life* by Greg Jenner. "Short, easy-to-read, entertaining chapters about everyday life through the ages," she enthused.



A number of people, including **Steve Erwood** (@SteveErwood1), suggested EH Gombrich's *A Little History of the World*. Another popular choice for many, including **JSM History** (@historyjsm), was David Olusoga's *Black and British: A Short, Essential History* – a condensed and repackaged version of his much lauded 2016 book, newly aimed at young people.

Phoebe Style (@ph0ebestyle) tweeted that "*Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire* by Akala is one of the best books I've read recently – a good mix of personal experience and British history". And **@MrPattisonTeach** "would massively recommend Robert Lacey's *Great Tales from English History* series. Short, gripping accessible chapters on key points in English history," as well as "the illustrated version of Peter Frankopan's *The Silk Roads*". **Sean Goodwin** (@seanE_Goodwin) nominated Ian Mortimer's *Time Traveller's Guides* – "excellent and very accessible".

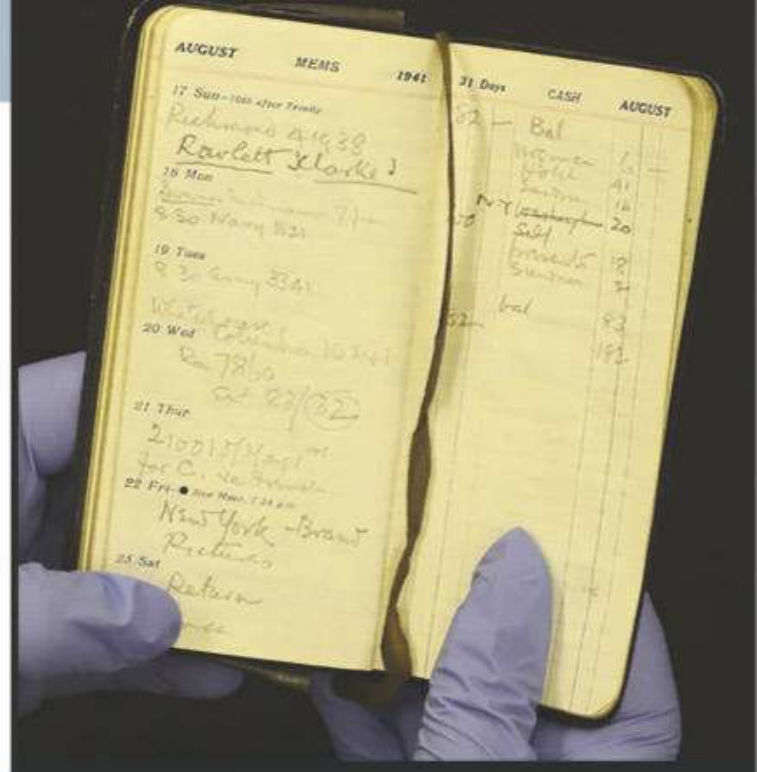
Meanwhile, **Kim** (@kim_b4) recommended: "*Agent Zigzag* or *Operation Mincemeat* by Ben Macintrye – excellent history books [that] read like thrillers." **Katie Taylor** (@ktltaylor2010) made the great suggestion of Kerstin Lücker's *A History of the World with the Women Put Back In*, calling it "both brilliant and very accessible".

Finally, **MJ Garland** (@MrG_Guybrarian) picked a new one on me: *The Eccentropedia: The Most Unusual People Who Have Ever Lived* by Chris Mikul. "Great to dip into, shines a light on figures not covered in history books, such as Jozef Stawinoga, the Wolverhampton roundabout hermit [who lived in a tent on the Wolverhampton ring road for decades and became famous in the local community]," he wrote. Sounds fascinating – and now on my reading list. H

Join the debate at **twitter.com/historyextra**

Anna Whitelock is professor of the history of monarchy and head of the history department at Royal Holloway University of London

ILLUSTRATION BY **IAN MORRIS**



This 1941 diary, written by Bletchley Park chief Alastair Denniston, is among a set of newly released documents

ESPIONAGE

Diary chronicles birth of spy pact

Documents charting the origins of a Cold War intelligence pact between Britain and the USA have been released for the first time.

The records detail wartime meetings between US and British officials at Bletchley Park, which led to the signing of the "UKUSA deal" in March 1946. That deal itself eventually evolved into the "Five Eyes" pact between the UK, US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand – which remains in force to this day.

The documents, released by Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) to mark the 75th anniversary of the UKUSA deal, include diary entries written by Alastair Denniston, then head of codebreaking site Bletchley Park. One entry from February 1941 – "The Ys are coming!" – indicated that he was preparing to welcome the first delegation of American, or "Yankee", codebreakers to the site at a time when the US was yet to enter the war.

Denniston told his assistant, Barbara Abernethy: "There are going to be four Americans who are coming to see me at 12 o'clock tonight. I require you to come in with the sherry. You are not to tell anybody who they are or what they will be doing."

The spies shared previously undisclosed information, including the fact that the UK had cracked the German "Enigma" code. The meeting was a success, and Denniston's diary describes how he later travelled to the US to meet his counterparts there on several occasions. H

GCHQ

HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**

Historians devise new tools to help read other people's letters

Before the mass manufacture of envelopes in the 19th century, letter-writers warded off prying eyes by folding their missives into intricate designs, sealed with wax. "Letter-locking" was an ingenious solution that presents historians with a difficult choice: leave potentially valuable records unopened, or risk causing major damage. Now experts have deployed new techniques to read a letter from 1697 – without breaking its seal.

The document is one of hundreds of unopened letters sent to the Netherlands between 1689 and 1706, that were kept in a trunk by postmasters when they could not be delivered. Researchers scanned it with X-ray imaging to create a 3D reconstruction, before using a computer program to identify the number of layers and the order in which they were folded. They then reversed the process virtually to read the words inside.

Although this example may offer only a small glimpse into the past – the letter is from a legal professional requesting a death certificate from a relative – the technique could allow experts to explore letters that have not been read for centuries.

A historical letter being virtually "unfolded", allowing researchers to read it for the first time since 1697

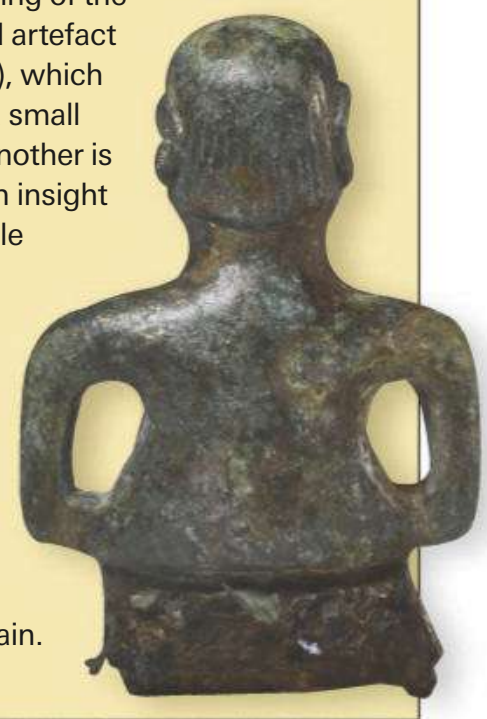
Seville bar work reveals 12th-century bathhouse

Renovations to a tapas bar in the Spanish city of Seville have uncovered a beautifully preserved Islamic *hammam*, or bathhouse – confirming a local legend of such a building on the site. When workers removed the plaster covering the bar's vaulted ceiling they found star-shaped skylights, with subsequent exploration revealing many other intricate designs. It's thought the room was covered up during improvement work carried out in the early 20th century.

Ancient Britons sported "mullets", find suggests

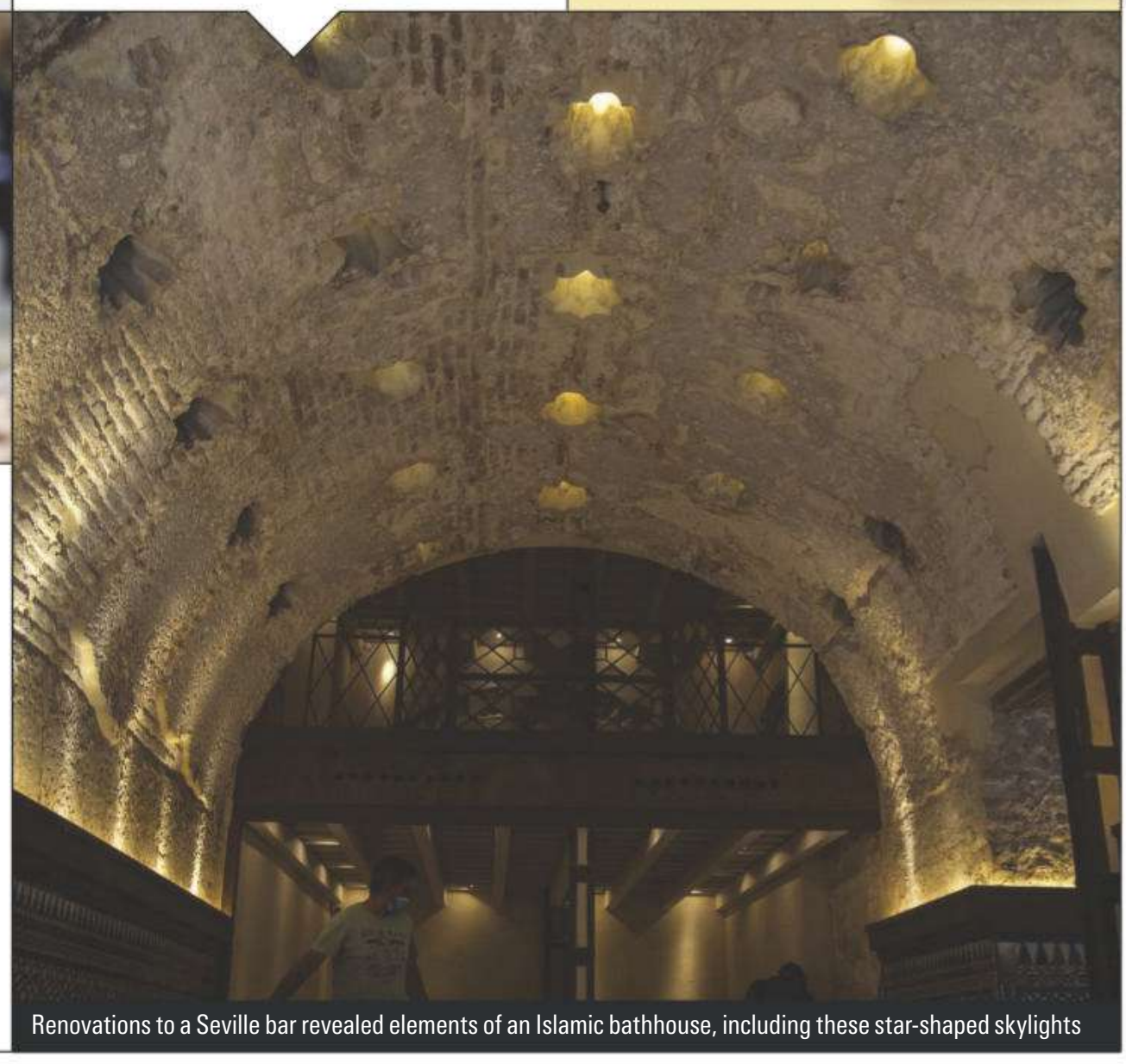
We may now associate the mullet hairstyle – short at the front, but long at the back – with the worst excesses of 1980s culture. Yet a figurine found during a dig at Cambridgeshire's Wimpole Estate in 2018 suggests men in Roman-era Britain may have deployed a strikingly similar look.

That's one of the theories for the distinctive styling of the 2,000-year-old artefact (pictured right), which also features a small moustache. Another is that it offers an insight into how people of the time perceived their gods. In either case, experts suggest it offers new clues about the aesthetics of ancient Britain.



Bristol council calls for inquiry into historical slavery

The legacy of slavery in Britain has never been far from the headlines in recent months – and now a city council is calling for a parliamentary inquiry to be set up to explore how reparations could be paid for the UK's role in the transatlantic slave trade. Bristol City Council debated the issue at a meeting in March, with the city's Labour mayor Marvin Rees (pictured) citing "the chance to have a national and international discussion" about the subject. Councillors will now write to MPs about the proposal after the motion passed by 35 votes. H



Renovations to a Seville bar revealed elements of an Islamic bathhouse, including these star-shaped skylights

UNLOCKING HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP/NATIONAL TRUST /GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Flying the royal nest

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's departure from the royal family is the latest in a string of shock exits from the monarchy dating back centuries. **TRACY BORMAN** looks to the past to consider how one can leave "the Firm" successfully – and the difficulties of life as a royal exile

"We woke in the reign of Edward VIII and went to bed in that of George VI." The remark by Sir Henry "Chips" Channon, a close associate of Edward, summed up the general sense of disbelief at his decision to abdicate the throne in 1936. The parallels with a more recent royal prince are striking. Like Edward VIII, Prince Harry had enjoyed huge popularity thanks to his informal style, which brought a welcome modernity to the royal family. Then without warning, he gave up his royal duties for the woman he loved – his wife Meghan Markle who, like Wallis Simpson, is an American divorcee. Even though Prince Harry had little prospect of ever inheriting the throne, the sense of shock sparked by his sudden departure was just as great, and there has been intense media scrutiny ever since, heightened by the recent Oprah Winfrey interview. But can he learn anything from his great-great uncle's example – and that of other royal exiles?

Edward VIII himself admitted "there is nothing kingly about me". Sensitive and highly strung, he was more interested in fashion and parties than knuckling down to his royal duties. In January 1936, he ascended the throne on a wave of popularity, but trouble was lurking just beneath the surface. There are photographs of him looking bored as he carried out his first public duties. He complained: "Being a monarch… can surely be one of the most confining, the most frustrating, and over the duller stretches, the least stimulating jobs open to an educated, independent-minded person."

Now that he was king, Edward was expected to give up his mistress, the twice-married American socialite Wallis Simpson. As the head of the Church of England, which forbade marriage to divorcees, it was out of the question that Edward could take her as his wife. But he was ardently in love with her. "To him, she was the perfect woman," a close friend recalled.

Having failed to find a way to keep both Wallis and his crown, on 10 December 1936 Edward signed an instrument of abdication. The following night, he delivered a worldwide broadcast, in which he famously declared:

In the spotlight Harry and Meghan pose with mentors from a charity in South Africa, 2019. The couple's recent Oprah Winfrey interview caused shockwaves

Prince Charming Wallis Simpson and the Duke of Windsor, formerly Edward VIII, at the Château de Candé in 1937. Edward abdicated the throne in order to marry the American divorcee

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Forging her own path
Diana walks through an area littered with landmines in Angola, 1997. After leaving the royal family, she was celebrated for her philanthropic efforts

"I have found it impossible to… discharge my duties as king… without the help and support of the woman I love." His 327-day reign was the shortest of any recognised monarch since Edward V's in 1483, and he is the only British monarch to abdicate voluntarily.

Edward and Wallis, styled the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, lived out their days in luxury and at leisure, residing mostly near the Bois de Boulogne in Paris and in New York, as well as a brief spell in the Bahamas, when Edward was appointed governor. Frustrated, embittered and increasingly bored, he sought distraction in high society gatherings and, together with his wife, assumed celebrity status. They also courted controversy by making a well-publicised visit to Germany in October 1937, during which they met Adolf Hitler and the duke gave a full Nazi salute. What little public sympathy he and Wallis had retained had long since dissipated by the time of his death in 1972.

The people's princess

A more recent royal exile, Diana, Princess of Wales, arguably made a much better job of carving out a life for herself away from the royal family. Diana's marriage to Prince Charles in 1981 seemed, from the outside at least, every inch the fairy tale. Aged just 20, the beautiful bride had been swept off her feet by the 32-year-old heir to the throne. The birth of Prince William a year after the wedding, closely followed by that of Prince Harry, appeared to set the seal on their happiness. But it was not long before cracks began to appear in the relationship.

Diana was the most photographed woman in the world and had the popular touch that most other royals painfully lacked – her husband included. More serious were the allegations that Charles had revived his relationship with a former girlfriend, Camilla Parker Bowles, early in the marriage. The princess also admitted to adultery. They separated in 1992 and divorced four years later, following Diana's notorious *Panorama* interview.

Now at a safe distance from "the Firm", Diana thrived in her newfound freedom, acting as an advocate for causes close to her heart and becoming the "queen of people's hearts" that she had told *Panorama* she wished to be. Her ability to relate to people, no matter their background or experience, was vividly demonstrated when she visited hospitals, hugging victims of Aids and leprosy, or walked along a path strewn with landmines in war-torn Angola. This philanthropic role appeared to shine a beacon to her future, promising greater happiness and fulfilment than she had ever found within the royal family.

But it was not to last. On 31 August 1997, just over a year after her divorce had been finalised, the princess was killed in a car crash in Paris with her new partner, Dodi Fayed. Few events in British history have prompted the scale of national dismay and bewilderment that followed. Grief soon turned to anger at what appeared to be a complete lack of sympathy on the part

"Edward and Wallis lived out their days in luxury and at leisure, but the former king became frustrated, embittered and increasingly bored with his lot"

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Coming out on top
Anne of Cleves shrewdly navigated her annulment and adapted to her new life with dignity. She kept Henry VIII's favour and stayed on the right side of his successors, Edward VI and Mary I

GETTY IMAGES/LORENTZ GULLACHSEN

of the palace. The media predicted the end of the House of Windsor, but a speech by the Queen and the raising of the Buckingham Palace flag to half-mast as a sign of respect dissolved much of the tension.

Living in luxurious obscurity

Looking further back in history, there are other examples of royals who have struck out on their own – although more by obligation than choice. After the death of King Charles II – the so-called "Merrie Monarch" – in 1685, the crown passed to his brother, James. The new king sparked widespread resentment through his staunch Roman Catholicism and was ousted from the throne after just three years by his Protestant daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange, in the "Glorious Revolution". He escaped to exile in France, where he was the guest of Louis XIV, the celebrated "Sun King". Although James made a number of rather half-hearted attempts to reclaim his throne, he eventually resigned himself to a life of luxurious obscurity at the château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where he died in 1701.

"One of the best role models for a royal exile is Anne of Cleves, who enjoyed all the riches and honours of a queen with none of the disadvantages of being Henry's wife"

Perhaps one of the best role models for a royal exile is Henry VIII's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves. The much-married king, who had agreed to the betrothal before meeting his bride and had seen her countenance only through portraits, famously disliked her on sight and immediately began proceedings for an annulment. Having learned from the examples of her predecessors, Anne made it easy for him, and the marriage was formally ended in July 1540, just six months after it had begun.

The former queen was richly rewarded for her compliance. Henry granted her a very generous settlement that comprised several luxurious properties, her royal jewels and furnishings, and a hefty wodge of cash. She also enjoyed the status of the king's "sister", taking precedence over most of his subjects.

It says much for Anne's strength of character that she managed to accept and adapt to her new life with dignity, winning praise and respect for her sensible, cheerful manner. She enjoyed all the riches and honours of a queen, but none of the disadvantages of being married to the ageing, bloated and increasingly tyrannical king. Anne outlived her estranged husband, kept on the right side of his son and successor, Edward VI and, despite their religious differences, of Henry's elder daughter, "Bloody" Mary. She also became close friends with his younger daughter, the future Elizabeth I, although sadly died a year before she became queen.

Anne of Cleves stands as proof that there can be life after the royal family. She kept her counsel, stayed friends with everyone and focused on living a happy, fulfilling life. Perhaps she can offer hope to those who leave "the Firm" behind. H

Tracy Borman is a historian and joint chief curator for Historic Royal Palaces. Her books include *Henry VIII and the Men Who Made Him* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2018)

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MICHAEL WOOD ON...
EXCAVATING INDIA'S FIRST CITIES

"A hitherto unknown civilisation had suddenly come into the light of day"

It's a century ago this year that the first great discoveries took place at Harappa, a huge mudbrick mound south of Lahore in what is now Pakistan, to be followed the following year at Mohenjo-daro, more than 400 miles south-west of Harappa. The remains of ancient cities were unearthed at the two sites; both belonged to a hitherto unknown civilisation that had suddenly, unexpectedly, come into the light of day. I remember talking it over some years ago with the late Ahmad Hasan Dani, who worked on Mohenjo-daro with Sir Mortimer Wheeler. He said: "At that time the Indian subcontinent was under British rule. The Europeans saw India as a backward place… Few people suspected that India had such a prehistory."

All that changed in 1921. It was truly epoch-making: "Not often has it been given to archaeologists," the British excavator John Marshall reflected, "to light upon the remains of a long-forgotten civilisation. It looks, however, at this moment, as if we were on the threshold of such a discovery here in the plains of the Indus."

So the idea of the Indus civilisation was born. Like Mesopotamia, Egypt and China, India's first cities had grown up on a river. The ruins of Harappa stood on the dried-up bed of a tributary of the Indus. Its huge citadel walls had been quarried away by Victorian railway contractors in the 1860s, but the excavators still found evidence of industry and trade, of high-level organisation – and writing. Harappa was far older than anything previously known in India, where cities were thought to have emerged at the time of the Buddha, around 500 BC, and writing even later. But now, astonishingly, we discovered there had been huge cities in India at the time of the Pyramids of Giza. By ancient standards, Mohenjo-daro was an urban giant, a "Bronze Age Manhattan".

Mohenjo-daro had perhaps been the centre of an empire which extended from the Arabian Sea to the Himalayas. Just like their modern descendants, the Indus people were traders. From here their boats sailed to the Persian Gulf and Iraq carrying cargoes of ivory, teak and lapis lazuli.

With more than 2,000 towns and villages, this was the largest civilisation in the ancient world, and with up to 5 million people, it had the biggest population. And it was indigenous – its roots went back to settlements in Baluchistan from the seventh millennium BC.

Remarkably, its language has still not been deciphered – surely the greatest riddle in archaeology. The waters have been muddied by politics: today in Pakistan, Islamic history predominates in scholarship and education. In India, on the other hand, the Hindu Nationalist government focuses on "Hindu" history, using the early Vedic texts to prove that Indian religion (what we know as Hinduism) was always in the subcontinent, and hence the Indus cities were in some sense "Hindu" and spoke a form of Sanskrit, the language of the Hindu gods. This is rejected by most linguists. Modern studies show that the family tree of Indo-European languages spread from the Anatolian region around 9,000 years ago, and people speaking Old Persian and Sanskrit migrated into Afghanistan and the north-west frontier (a region in what's now Pakistan) in the Late Bronze Age, after climate change caused the Indus cities to decline.

These confusions have left the study of the Indus civilisation and its unknown language in a curious limbo. (Although the Indologist Asko Parpola and his team in Helsinki are convinced they spoke an early form of Dravidian, the language group still spoken today by more than 200 million people, mainly in south India.)

It is these questions that make the Indus civilisation such an exciting area of scholarship: its wide extent; the scale of its cities; its unknown language. And no sign of warfare – no defences, weapons or images of warriors – have ever been found, unlike "war-addicted ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and China" (as Andrew Robinson writes in his engaging new book *The Indus*). More no doubt is to come. The huge, unexcavated city mound at Ganweriwala in the Cholistan desert, for example, has recently yielded the same clay seals, the same tantalising yogic figures that seem to beckon from India's deep past.

So the centenary of this excavation gives us much to celebrate, and much to ponder. No doubt new discoveries will be made when India and Pakistan are prepared to put more time and resources into their shared roots. A great joint project, perhaps?

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series and his latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2020). His twitter handle is @mayavision

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ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

ANNIVERSARIES

DOMINIC SANDBROOK highlights events that took place in May in history

1 MAY 1169

Anglo-Normans land in Ireland for the first time

Troops cross the Irish Sea to help a disgraced king regain his throne

Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster (shown below) has not had a good press. According to the historian Gerald of Wales, he was "a man who liked better to be feared by all than loved by any. One who would oppress his greater vassals, while he raised to high station men of lowly birth. A tyrant to his own subjects, he was hated by strangers; his hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him."

Dermot was even accused of kidnapping the abbess of Kildare and killing more than a hundred people who tried to stop this "wanton and sacrilegious outrage".

In 1166 an alliance of rival Irish kings rose against Dermot and kicked him out. But he was not a man to stay down for long. Having fled across the Irish Sea into exile, Dermot then begged for help from England's king, Henry II. "Henceforth, all the days of my life, on condition that you be my helper so that I do not lose everything," he promised, "you I shall acknowledge, as sire and lord."

Ireland and Britain had always been part of the same world: the Vikings who ravaged England's shores had also founded Dublin, and there had long been trading contacts across the sea. But on 1 May 1169, Dermot's entreaties produced a fateful result.

At Bannow Bay, in County Wexford, the Anglo-Norman adventurers Robert FitzStephen and Maurice Prendergast landed with 40 knights, 60 men-at-arms and more than 300 archers. These were the men who were going to recover Dermot's throne – and in return, they wanted Irish lands of their own.

They made quick progress, not least because many of the Irish were armed only with stones. Wexford fell within weeks, and by 1170 Dermot had recovered his throne. But the bigger story was the arrival of the English – the first chapter in a long and bloody saga.

ALAMY/AKG-IMAGES/ COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

A still from the 1933 Disney film *Three Little Pigs*, which was a huge hit in the US

27 MAY 1933

Walt Disney releases the short animated film *Three Little Pigs* to an ecstatic reaction, with many American cinemas running it for months to come. It becomes famous for its song 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?', memorably performed by Fiddler and Fifer Pig.

28 MAY 1588

The Spanish Armada sets sail

King Philip II's fleet leaves for England's shores – where disaster awaits

In the spring of 1588, Lisbon was abuzz with activity. For months the king of Spain and Portugal, the mighty Philip II, had been planning an attack upon the Protestant heretic, Elizabeth of England. Two years earlier he had sent instructions across his empire, ordering harbours on the Mediterranean to send ships and weapons to the Portuguese capital, from where his invasion fleet would sail.

By the beginning of May, the preparations were almost complete. Philip's admiral, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, had collected an armada of 130 ships of every shape and size: low troop transports; carracks and caravels; galleys powered by sweating oarsmen; tall, courtly galleons. There were six fighting squadrons and 23 supply hulks, 8,000 sailors, 2,431 guns, 600,000lbs of salt pork and 14,000 barrels of wine. Nothing would be left to chance.

Not all the omens were good, however. The original plan had been to sail earlier in the spring, but the weather was unseasonably grim and stormy, and the expedition was constantly being postponed. This meant any element of surprise was lost, since Elizabeth knew perfectly well what was happening. And in Flanders, where Philip's men were already fighting rebels, 30,000 troops waited impatiently for their transports to arrive.

At last, on 28 May, it was time to sail. Medina Sidonia hoisted the holy banner, blessed by Pope Sixtus V himself. The crowds along the quaysides cheered and waved, and the fleet eased out into the mouth of the river Tagus.

But they were, of course, sailing straight to disaster.

A copy of a 16th-century depiction of the Spanish Armada fighting English ships. A delayed departure cost the fleet its element of surprise – and that proved fatal

A sixth-century mosaic of Emperor Justinian, who convened the Second Council of Constantinople

5 MAY 553

At the behest of Emperor Justinian, the **Second Council of Constantinople opens** in the East Roman capital to try to reconcile rival views about the nature of Christ: was he human, divine or a mixture of both? However, theological unity remained elusive.

29 MAY 1943

Rosie the Riveter hits the headlines

The iconic image debuts on the cover of The Saturday Evening Post

At the beginning of 1943, a jaunty new song seized the imagination of the American people. From the traffic cops in the streets of Chicago to the shoeshine boys at New York's Grand Central station, everybody was whistling it. And thousands of women working in factories across the United States knew every word of every line. After all, they were in it.

The song was 'Rosie the Riveter', by the Four Vagabonds. It tells the story of a girl called Rosie, working on the assembly line to build planes for the US Air Force. Her boyfriend, Charlie, is away with the Marines. But she is determined to do her bit. Wiping the grease from her sweating brow, she's "making history, working for victory".

'Rosie the Riveter' was the sensation of the season. Soon it was surging up the sales charts, and to mark the moment *The Saturday Evening Post* asked the nation's most popular artist, Norman Rockwell, to design a special Rosie the Riveter cover. (Not to be mistaken for the 1942 'We Can Do It' poster, also featuring a female riveter.)

Rockwell based his Rosie on a real person: a 19-year-old telephone operator, Mary Doyle. For inspiration, Rockwell turned to Michelangelo's painting of the prophet Isaiah, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In place of the prophet, his picture shows Rosie munching a sandwich, her arms bulging with muscles. Her blue work shirt is covered with badges: an army production award, a V for Victory badge, even a Red Cross blood donor's badge. Her foot rests scornfully on a copy of *Mein Kampf.* Behind her flies the American flag.

Rockwell's cover became a symbol of a great national crusade, uniting millions of men and women against the tyrants of Germany and Japan. The only person who didn't like it was Mary Doyle, who was rather slimmer than Rockwell's Rosie.

Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter cover, 1943. Based on a popular song of the same name, it came to symbolise the American people's fight against Germany and Japan in the Second World War

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An 1878 poster for *HMS Pinafore*. The musical was hugely popular, spawning imitations in the US

25 MAY 1878

HMS Pinafore enthrals audiences

Gilbert and Sullivan's latest musical is a storming success on both sides of the pond

At the end of 1877, the composer Arthur Sullivan was on holiday in France when he had a letter from his chief collaborator, the writer WS Gilbert. The two men had just signed a deal to produce a new light opera for the impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte, and Gilbert had good news. He already had an outline of the new opera's plot: a love story on a Royal Navy ship, brimming with silliness. "I have very little doubt whatever but that you will be pleased with it," he assured Sullivan. "There is a good deal of fun in it which I haven't set down on paper."

HMS Pinafore opened at London's Opera Comique on 25 May 1878 and was an immediate sensation, with reports of "eager playgoers pushing and praying for seats or at least for standing room". The critic of *The Era* wrote he had rarely "been in the company of a more joyous audience, more confidently anticipating an evening's amusement than that which filled the Opera Comique in every corner". It was "a hit, a palpable hit".

In just 18 months, 150 unauthorised productions of *HMS Pinafore* were put on in the United States, while it played for night after night in London to enthusiastic houses. And it remains a cultural touchstone today: you can find its songs in everything from *Star Trek* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* to *Family Guy*, *The West Wing* and even *The Simpsons*. H

Dominic Sandbrook co-presents the weekly podcast *The Rest Is History* with historian Tom Holland, available on all platforms

GETTY IMAGES

WHY WE SHOULD REMEMBER...

How **Chanel No 5** revolutionised the beauty business

BY **ANNE DE COURCY**

One hundred years ago, in May 1921, Coco Chanel launched the scent that was destined to become the world's most famous – Chanel No 5. She had chosen it a year earlier, when she sniffed the contents of several small glass bottles that held different perfume samples. When she put the fifth one down, so the story goes, she turned to the man who had made them and said: "Le voilà!" And so history was made.

Chanel had wanted to launch a perfume that was new and different. The scents then worn by smart women were pure flower essences such as gardenia, rose and jasmine, which were light and fresh – and quickly wore off. Only the *cocottes* (prostitutes) wore more sensual, longer-lasting perfumes, based on musk and civet, that added to their sexual allure.

"Chanel believed that postwar, liberated women would welcome a scent that exuded sensuality"

But Chanel believed that, three years after the end of the First World War, a more liberated generation of women would welcome what their *demi-mondaine* sisters found so successful. Her chance to achieve this came about through one of her lovers, Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, who introduced her to a master *parfumeur* – hence the glass phials.

Chanel's assumption proved correct. Success was immediate: when she wore Chanel No 5 women stopped in their tracks when they passed her table in a restaurant. The impact on global markets was huge.

Coco Chanel in Paris, 1929. Her perfume Chanel No 5 inspired a new trend among fashion houses to sell signature cosmetics

While only the very rich could buy Chanel's chic, streamlined clothes, almost anybody could buy a bottle of Chanel No 5 – and with it, a small piece of the Chanel style and magic.

The square bottle with the CC logo in which Chanel No 5 made its entrance is still around today. Yet its real legacy is not so much its decades of popularity but its inspiring of a new trend: the custom of fashion houses selling aids to beauty as well as clothes. For after perfume came cosmetics; now virtually every fashion house has a perfume and make-up range.

But perhaps the most impressive moment in the story of this iconic scent came at the end of the Second World War, when Chanel, who had spent most of the war years living with her German lover, fell under suspicion of being a collaborator and was thus in the sights of the authorities. When the US army entered Paris as liberators, she gave orders that every American soldier could call at her perfume boutique and receive a free bottle of Chanel No 5. The queue lasted for hours, with those who could not speak French simply holding up five fingers. As Malcolm Muggeridge, in Paris for MI6, said, these men "would have been outraged if the French police had touched a hair of her head". H

Anne de Courcy is a historian and author whose books include *Chanel's Riviera* (Macmillan, 2020)

LETTERS

Clement Attlee pictured in uniform, c1915. His First World War service was key in bolstering his political reputation, says Antonia Fraser

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Prime cuts

The feature on Britain's best prime ministers (*Who Is Britain's Greatest Prime Minister?*, April) no doubt had every reader carefully considering their measure of agreement. I would have expected Gladstone to make the cut, but a good case was made for all.

My choice as number one would be Robert Peel. As home secretary he had already enraged the Tory grandees by Catholic emancipation and, despite knowing it was unlikely to help his own political career, forced through the repeal of the Corn Laws because it was the right thing to do. If you add the development of the Conservative party via the Tamworth Manifesto and the Liberal party through the Liberal Tories, Peel's claim is strong.

I was also pleased to see Harold Wilson included – although surely his greatest achievement was omitted. Doubtless the social legislation relating to abortion and homosexuality was progressive and long overdue, but the thanks of a generation were due to him for keeping Britain out of the Vietnam War. Despite enormous and concerted pressure from Lyndon Johnson, including threats to stop propping up the pound sterling, Wilson refused to commit ground troops to Vietnam. This may have caused a deterioration of Anglo-American relations, but it prevented Britain from becoming entangled in a morally repugnant war.
Glyn Barrott, Dronfield

We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **Norse America: The Story of a Founding Myth** by Gordon Campbell. You can read our review of the book on page 82

A major contribution

I was surprised to see that Charlotte Lydia Riley's interesting account of Clement Attlee as prime minister (April) did not mention his service in the First World War.

"Major Attlee", as he was sometimes still known, fought throughout the war, the battle of Gallipoli in 1915 being only one example. He gained three medals. This was important to his reputation in 1945, in the aftermath of the Second World War.
Antonia Fraser, London

The lives of others

I read with great interest Professor Bloxham's article on the place of emotive and judgmental language in history writing (*Why History Must Take a Stance*, March). All of us are children of our time and everything we say and do reflects that. Each generation will have a fresh view of the past, which is why history books continue to be written.

Any good journalist or film director will give us a vivid account of the "what". It's the historian's job, though, to ask why. To answer that, a step back is necessary, to take a view of the context in space, culture and time. Distasteful as it might often be, it's also important to see events through the eyes of the perpetrators of barbarity – and sometimes to ask ourselves if we, in those circumstances, would have done the same. If we do that, we shall usually be rather less willing to hand out praise and blame and more likely to learn from a study of the past.
Malcolm Green, Glasgow

The warp and weft of history

Thank you for the article on the Bayeux Tapestry (March). Edgar Ætheling has indeed been airbrushed out of history and not just out of the tapestry. I find it especially fascinating that William the Conqueror allowed him to live, despite Edgar's rebellions in the early years of his reign.

Edgar should have been proclaimed king on the death of Edward the Confessor in 1066. His age was no barrier: his great grandfather, Æthelred the Unready, was a child when he came to the throne, and Edgar was a teenager, with able commanders such as Harold to lead armies into battle against invaders until Edgar was older. Edward the Confessor surely had Edgar as his choice and would never have offered the crown to William of Normandy – nor suggested Harold took it!
Fen Flack, Worcestershire

The cost of war

In Nick Lloyd's excellent *How the West Was Won* (March), he argues that the western front "ushered in a new age of warfare" and further states that "human flesh had been replaced by technology and industry". How, then, can we explain that, in spite of even greater advances in technology and industry, the human cost of the Second World War remained just as high?

At the battle of Passchendaele (31 July–10 November 1917), considered a disaster, British and Canadian losses were 244,897. But in Operation Overlord (6 June–25 August 1944), which is considered to be a success, there were Allied losses of 224,153 and thousands of French civilian losses, as well as collateral damage resulting in over 350,000 people being made homeless. This is hardly evidence that the lessons supposedly learned on the western front were carried forward to the Normandy campaign.
Anthony Lewis, Huntingdon

A face in the crowd

I was surprised to open your Christmas 2020 issue to see a photo of myself in the crowd at an equal pay for women demo back in 1969.

I remember it well. At age 16 I spent every Sunday in central London to get away from my parents. I happened to be in Trafalgar Square that day, and somebody gave me a poster and I just hung around to watch the fun. The next day my father saw the photo in the *Daily Express* and managed to get a copy.

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

Reader Ray Baynes was surprised by our inclusion of this 1969 picture of himself at a women's rights demo

A contemporary depiction of the Greek War of Independence. Panos Augustithis highlights the 200th anniversary of the Greek revolution

I can now look back at a very troubled young man who was drifting into the drug culture but had a complete change around. I'm now a Salvation Army Officer in Newport, Gwent, so all I can say is thanks for the reminder and thank God for a lucky escape.
Envoy Ray Baynes, Newport

Independence day

I was most disappointed that your March issue made no mention of the 200th anniversary of the beginning of the Greek revolution against the Ottoman rule and the creation of the Hellenic State. Greek people all over the world celebrate 25 March 1821 as Independence Day, and it's a date never to be forgotten.
Panos Augustithis, Edinburgh

Time management

In respect of Sasha Handley's piece on alarm clocks (*Q&A*, February), mention might be made of the "knockers up" who thrived in the 19th and early 20th centuries in northern English industrial towns and places where the natural sounds of the countryside were absent. Using poles and pea shooters, they enabled mill workers to keep good time.

I have also had the curious experience, in a Majorcan village, of a church clock that accurately chimed the early morning hours, but repeated the process five minutes later for those who had missed the first chimes.
JD Abell, Christchurch, New Zealand

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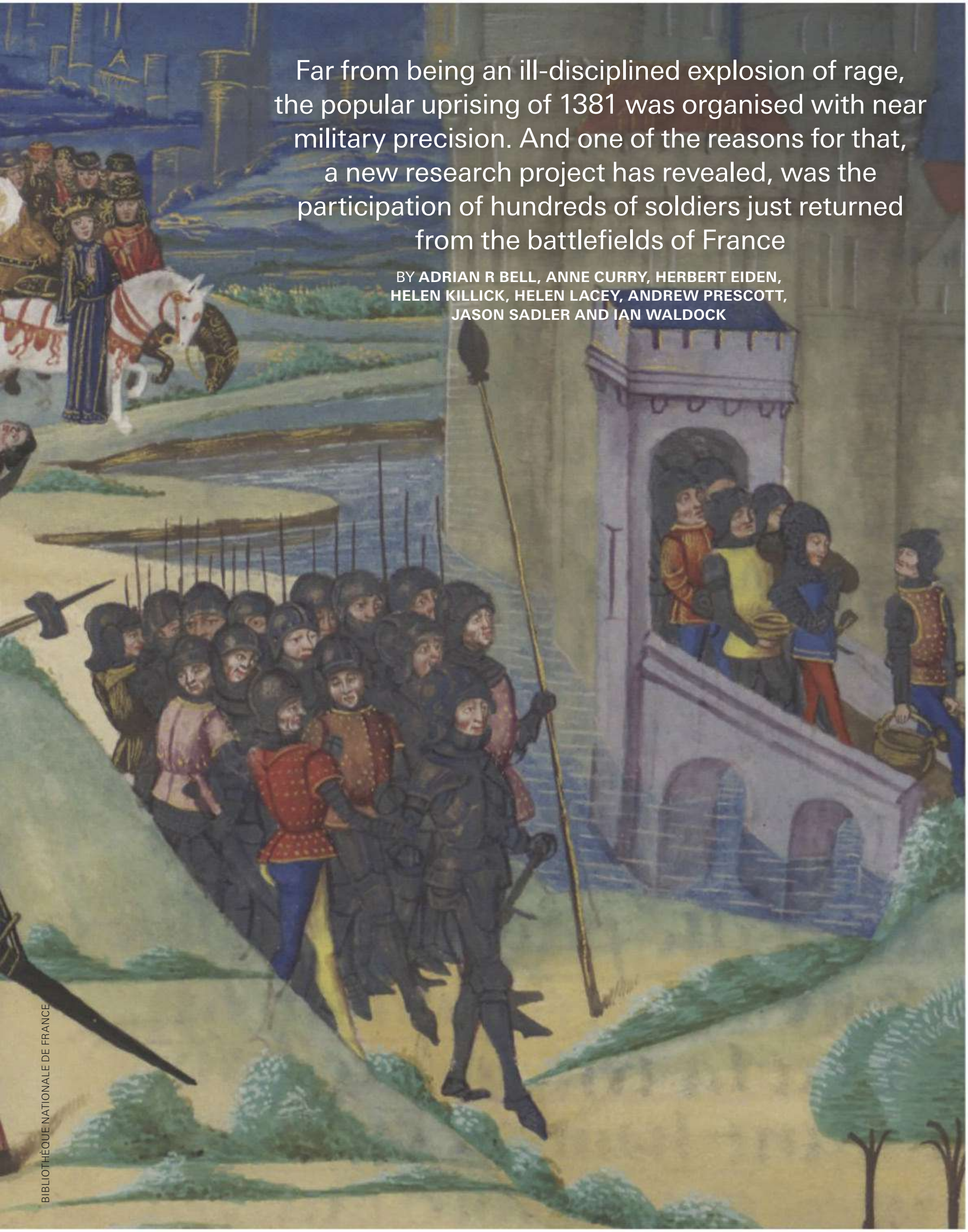
› Page 60

PEASANTS' REVOLT OR SOLDIERS' INSURGENCY?

Kill and be killed
This 15th-century miniature depicting the Peasants' Revolt shows: (left) rebels killing the veteran military commander Sir Robert Salle at Norwich; (right) insurgents entering London; and (top) the death of rebel leader Wat Tyler. A new research project is challenging the idea that the rebellion consisted mainly of rural labourers



Far from being an ill-disciplined explosion of rage, the popular uprising of 1381 was organised with near military precision. And one of the reasons for that, a new research project has revealed, was the participation of hundreds of soldiers just returned from the battlefields of France

BY **ADRIAN R BELL, ANNE CURRY, HERBERT EIDEN, HELEN KILLICK, HELEN LACEY, ANDREW PRESCOTT, JASON SADLER AND IAN WALDOCK**

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"When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" This radical challenge to the social order was delivered by the priest John Ball as he preached to rebel leader Wat Tyler and his companions at Blackheath in June 1381 – and it has resonated ever since. What gave lords their rights to power and land, the insurgents asked. To hammer home the point, crowds of them marched on London.

"Commoners" from Essex, Kent and Hertfordshire rushed through the city gates on 13 June with support not only from the lower classes of Londoners – craftsmen, journeymen, labourers, servants and lower clergy – but also from richer citizens. Public order collapsed. The houses of ecclesiastical and secular dignitaries were broken into and plundered.

Amid the chaos, the young king, Richard II, and his advisers sheltered in the Tower of London. Just outside, on Tower Hill, an unbelievable drama unfolded as the rebels beheaded five men – among them Simon Sudbury, chancellor of England and archbishop of Canterbury, and Robert Hales, prior of the Knights Hospitaller and Treasurer of England – before displaying their heads on poles.

Coordinated violence was breaking out across the country: at Lakenheath in Suffolk, 80 miles north-east of the capital, the rebels hunted down and beheaded the highest judge of the land, Sir John Cavendish. Large parts of England, from Somerset to Kent, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and parts of Yorkshire were in turmoil. Tensions that had been smouldering under the surface in a society already disrupted by the Black Death and inconclusive wars with France had finally erupted into unprecedented levels of rioting. It was a perfect storm: "the hurling time", as it was afterwards to be remembered.

Holy blood Rebels behead Simon Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury, on Tower Hill, as shown in a contemporary manuscript. By now, coordinated violence was erupting across England

A plan of action

But who *were* the rebels plunging the country into chaos? The events of the summer of 1381 have traditionally been called the Peasants' Revolt, implying that the insurgents were rural labourers, who had been pushed into rebellion by the overbearing demands of their lords.

However, our major new project, "The People of 1381", is revealing that the picture was far more complex than that. A team of historians and computer scientists has analysed a vast database of legal, governmental and manorial records relating to the revolt, among them indictments produced by jurors summoned to appear before royal justices. Our research has revealed that the rebel bands weren't exclusively manned by rural peasants, but were instead made up of several distinct groups. And of all these cohorts, one in particular stands out. It consisted of veteran soldiers – men who had served in England's wars with France – and they brought to the rebellion levels of planning and strategy typical of campaigning armies in the field. Their presence helped transform what otherwise may have been a chaotic explosion of public rage into a disciplined and – for a few weeks, at least – effective insurgency.

VETERAN SOLDIERS BROUGHT TO THE PEASANTS' REVOLT LEVELS OF PLANNING TYPICAL OF CAMPAIGNING ARMIES

The legal records indicate that the degree of organisation in the revolt was astonishing; we could even say that the actions were implemented with military efficiency. How else was it possible for insurgents from different areas to coordinate their attacks on landlords and royal officials in their localities? How else could hundreds of men from around the country advance on London together, arriving at exactly the right place, and at the right time?

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ALAMY

War weary English troops arrive in Normandy, as shown in a late 14th-century manuscript. Soldiers' anger at the failures of the war with France, and the military skills they brought home with them, proved a potent mix in 1381

ALAMY

So what drew so many former soldiers to the rebellion? In many cases, it appears to have been a combination of anger at a raft of new taxes levied to cover the escalating cost of the French wars, and fading faith in the state. The imposition of a poll tax – which tripled between 1377 and 1380 – caused enormous resentment.

It was bad enough having to pay this heavy tax, but even worse when the government's military policies had failed. The English were losing the war. And now the French were sufficiently emboldened to launch raids on the ports and villages of southern England. With rebels in Kent feeling that they had little choice but to take the defence of the coast into their own hands, their faith in their government ebbed further still.

Stirring up trouble

One distinctive role of those with military experience in what we now call the Peasants' Revolt appears to have been in actively encouraging others to join the insurgency.

Indictments against the rebels give prominence to charges against those who rode from place to place spreading word of the rising.

An indictment against the rebels in Cambridgeshire states that John Peper of Linton – who had fought in France under Thomas of Woodstock, Richard II's uncle – rode with one of the main rebel groups in Cambridgeshire "carrying a lance with a pennant".

Another man, John Quenyld of Edenbridge in Kent, had received letters of protection for military service in France in 1380 but was in the King's Bench prison in Southwark at the time of the rising. As they passed through Southwark to cross London Bridge into the city, the rebels opened the prisons, a clear statement of their lack of confidence in royal government and justice. Quenyld escaped. He had connections in Surrey and first headed in that direction. We find him triggering major disturbances in Guildford. Quenyld also joined in the attack on the city authorities in Winchester, bursting into the merchants' hall and burning the records.

This was far from an isolated incident.

REBEL FIGHTERS

Military veterans who waged war on the state in the summer of 1381

Robert Hull was accused of joining the rebels who entered the abbey of St Mary Graces near the Tower of London. They assaulted the abbot and forced him to give up possession of their London properties. They also tore up books, charters and muniments.

Back in 1355, Hull had been the master of the king's ship *La Isabelle*, based in King's Lynn. He was authorised to impress 30 mariners and sail for Gascony. Over 20 years, Hull travelled numerous times in royal service. It seems that he was motivated to join the rebels because his lands were close to the abbey of St Mary Graces and he resented its property acquisitions.

The Stathums, from Morley in Derbyshire, came from a gentry family headed by a powerful woman, Goditha Stathum. On 18 June 1381, with news of rebellion reaching Derbyshire, Goditha seems to have encouraged her sons to attack targets linked to John of Gaunt, the king's uncle and a man with whom the family had a longstanding feud.

Four of the five brothers can be linked to military service: Ralph is likely to have fought with Sir Hugh Calverley at Calais in 1375; Thomas and William served with the Earl of Buckingham in 1380; and Robert served at Brest in 1393.

John Stakepoll was listed as one of four "principal leaders and traitors" of the rebellion and was beheaded for his part in the rebellion. Yet very little was recorded about him. What we do know is that when Stakepoll died, his possessions consisted of a red gown, a cloak made of red and green cloth, three hoods and a pair of worn-out stockings, a pair of worn-out thigh-boots, an earthenware pot, as well as a harp and a gittern (similar to a lute).

The colourful clothes and musical instruments suggest that Stakepoll might have been a minstrel. However, one more item points in another direction: an overslop (an overgarment or cover) for a chain mail covering the head and neck. Could John Stakepoll also have served as a soldier?

Across the country the rebels sought out and destroyed documents (both manorial records and government archives), symbolising both their rejection of authority and criticism of how the country was being run at a local and a national level. Often the rebels were accused of acting "in warlike manner". In other words, they behaved as though they were at war: raising banners (seen in this period as a declaration of war), brandishing weapons commonly used in conflict – and employing these weapons with lethal force.

They also used their specialist military skills. We can see from the legal records that rebels were deliberately arming themselves in preparation for their collective action. Robert Glover of Strood and Drerlyng Ceode, a barber, seized from the house of William Topcliff (a senior official of the archbishop of Canterbury) "a hauberk [shirt of mail], a target, a lance, a bow and two sheaves of arrows". Other rebels plundered armour and protective jackets.

Once in London the rebels made a beeline for the Great Wardrobe stores in the Tower of London. The list of items they stole – which included everything from mail shirts and helmets to axes and arrows – suggests that they knew what they were looking for.

Crushing revenge

Thanks to talents they had acquired on campaign, some rebels were capable of wreaking substantial damage to even the sturdiest of fortified houses – as William Topcliff discovered to his cost. Topcliff had been involved in heavy-handed judicial sessions at Dartford, provoking the residents and making him a target for the rebels. On 7 June 1381, they took their revenge.

Stealing a march
When rebels raided an ecclesiastical official's home, they stole military equipment including a lance, a bow and a hauberk, like the one shown above

THE REBELS MAY HAVE USED A LARGE SLING OR TREBUCHET TO LAUNCH BOULDERS AT WILLIAM TOPCLIFF'S HOUSE

TIMELINE **The perfect storm**

How the Peasants' Revolt rocked England

November –December 1380
Parliament grants a third **poll tax**. Then, in April 1381, sheriffs are ordered to ensure that arrears of **poll tax are collected**.

29 April 1381
Simon Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury, orders the **arrest of John Ball** for his inflammatory preaching.

10–11 June
Wat Tyler leads attacks at Canterbury, prisoners are released from the castle. The Hospitallers manor at Cressing Temple in Essex is destroyed and a local official beheaded.

12–13 June
Tyler and Kentish rebels assemble at Blackheath where **John Ball preaches** to them. They enter London and destroy **John of Gaunt's Savoy Palace**, the Hospitallers' headquarters at Clerkenwell and their manor at Highbury in Middlesex. Meanwhile, the rebels from Essex assemble in Mile End and enter via Aldgate.

14 June
King Richard II meets rebels at Mile End and grants letters of freedom. At the same time, rebels enter the Tower of London and **execute Simon Sudbury** (pictured above) and others.

The radical cleric John Ball preaches to rebels at Blackheath, before their advance on London

GETTY/BRIDGEMAN

Boat diplomacy

Froissart's *Chronicles* show Richard II acceding to many of the rebels' demands at Mile End, 14 June 1381. The speed with which the rebels flooded London wrong-footed the king's advisors

15–28 June

King Richard meets rebels at Smithfield where **Wat Tyler is killed** and the rebels disperse. Military and judicial commissions are issued to suppress the revolt. **There is unrest** in East Anglia, Winchester, York, Scarborough and Bridgwater.

25–28 June

Bishop Despenser kills many rebels at North Walsham in Norfolk, and Thomas of Woodstock defeats rebels at Billericay.

Late June to August

Royal commissioners **institute legal proceedings** against the rebels.

2 July

King Richard revokes the **letters of freedom granted** at Mile End.

13 December

Parliament agrees to a **general amnesty** for rebels, except for 287 of the most serious offenders.

The killing of Wat Tyler at Smithfield was a turning point in the Peasants' Revolt

ALAMY

Thomas Crowe of Snodland "dragged large boulders onto the house causing it to be crushed". The term used for Crowe's action in dragging the boulders is "trectum", suggesting that he might have used a large sling or trebuchet to launch the boulders that smashed Topcliff's house to bits. Crowe was an ex-soldier with garrison experience at Calais, where he would have learned how to use a trebuchet.

A number of Kent rebels were masons, and it is likely that some had been engaged in military service. Gilbert Stork and Lawrence Rockacre were accused of participating in one of the most notorious incidents of the entire revolt: the attack on the Savoy Palace, London residence of Richard II's uncle John of Gaunt. The "expertise" these masons had gained in military service may help explain why the palace was so badly damaged that it was never rebuilt.

Some of the rebels were army deserters, who had been lying low in Maidstone and Rochester after taking wages for a campaign to France but then absconding. One such was Thomas Wootton, who had been engaged to go on campaign to Brittany in the spring of 1381.

Intriguingly, Wootton was named as one of the leaders of the revolt by another rebel, Robert Bennett of Barford St John in Oxfordshire, who later "turned king's evidence" and informed on his former friends.

Bennett was in prison in Southwark when the revolt erupted. He claimed that Wootton had led a band of rebels that burst into the prison and freed those inside. Bennett also claimed that, in the panic, the wife of the keeper of the prison gave him six silver spoons to keep out of rebel hands. Bennett insisted that Wootton had forced him to hand over the spoons.

As a result of the allegations, all Wootton's possessions were held until £30 had been levied in compensation for the wages he had been paid to serve with the army.

The truth of Bennett's allegations was tested through trial by battle at Newgate gaol. Bennett vanquished Wootton, who was duly executed. But this was not enough to save Bennett's skin. For his role in the revolt, he, too, was put to death.

Sea-going insurgents

The rebellion didn't just attract veterans of England's land campaigns in France; mariners, it seems, played a role, too. In Kent, John Ellis, master of a balinger (a small sea-going vessel used to counter French raids), was said to have risen with others in the Isle of Sheppey on 11 June and to have seized land and livestock belonging to the unpopular Kentish royal official Nicholas Herring.

The fighting bishop

The visage of Henry le Despenser in King's Lynn Minster. Henry played a key role in the suppression of the revolt but that didn't stop him later recruiting pardoned rebels for his army

IN 1381, MEN EMPLOYED THEIR MARTIAL SKILLS TO DEVASTATING EFFECT – AGAINST THE VERY STATE THEY HAD ONCE FOUGHT FOR

John Ailrugge, shipman, is named in actions relating to disturbances in Bridgwater. He had served under John of Gaunt in Aquitaine in 1378. Another future rebel served on the same expedition. This was William Paynot of Weeley in Essex, who – along with an accomplice with a suggestive name, Woodgrave Mariner – was accused of inciting a rising in Essex on 27 June 1381 following the execution of the rebel John Preston of Hadleigh.

Some rebels were described as "travelling-men", representing a rootless, wayfaring way of life. One of these was John Young of Hereford, who was involved in the wool and cloth trade between Wales and England. He was engaged in 1383 to participate in a military "crusade" in Flanders under the bishop of Norwich, Henry le Despenser.

Young wasn't alone among Despenser's future troops to have been embroiled in the revolt. The authorities attempted to prosecute Richard Crisping of Catfield for his part in the destruction of the archives of the abbey of St Benet of Holme in Norfolk in 1381. Yet the case had to be dismissed because Richard was serving in Despenser's campaign in Flanders.

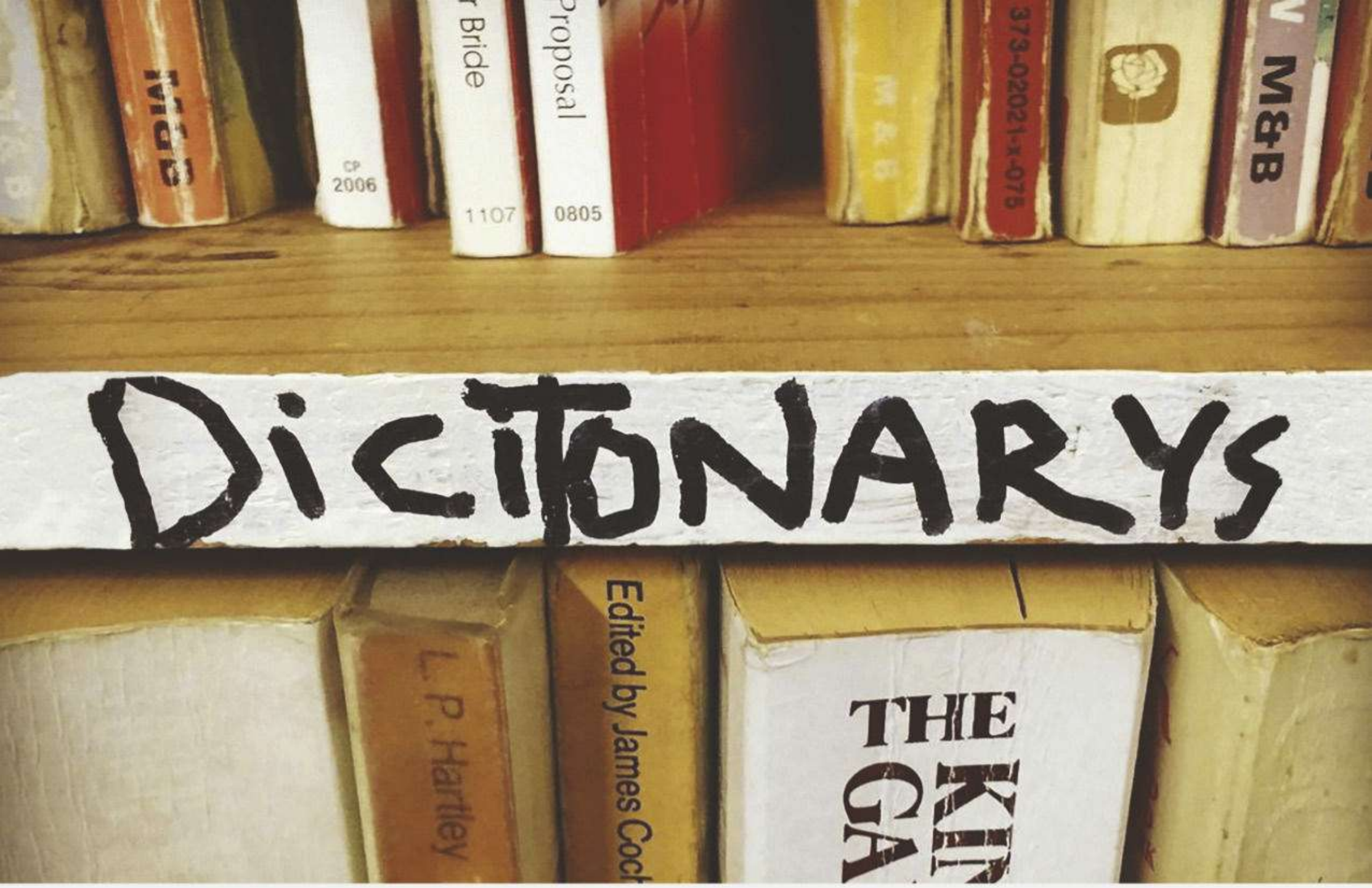
By the end of June, the king and his advisors had recovered their equilibrium, the rebel leader Wat Tyler was dead, and the insurgency's initial successes were quickly being reversed. Ironically, Henry le Despenser was heavily involved in the suppression of the revolt, leading the army that would deliver it a fatal blow at the battle of North Walsham on 25 or 26 June. But, as the case of Richard Crisping proves, that didn't stop him recruiting a number of former rebels for his army – these were, after all, useful men to have with him on the battlefield.

For generations, English soldiers – men like Crisping – had been acquiring military expertise in the many wars the nation had waged against the Scots, the Welsh, the Irish and, of course, the French. In 1381, they employed these martial skills to devastating effect once again – against the very state they fought for. H

WIKI IMAGES

Adrian R Bell, Anne Curry, Herbert Eiden, Helen Killick, Helen Lacey, Andrew Prescott, Jason Sadler and Ian Waldock are the team behind The People of 1381, a research project producing a comprehensive new interpretation of the Peasants' Revolt. Find out more at *1381.online*

LISTEN To listen to Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss the Peasants' Revolt on an episode of Radio 4's **In Our Time**, go to *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0038x8s*



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Moving with the times

"The survival of the office of prime minister is remarkable considering the profound changes it has experienced over the past 300 years," writes Anthony Seldon

TOPFOTO

The hot seat

Three centuries after its inception, **Sir Anthony Seldon** charts how the office of prime minister has defied hostile monarchs, a scandal-hungry media and two world wars to become the beating heart of Britain's body politic

The history of the British prime minister, 300 years old this April, is riddled with mysteries, in large part because no one has joined together all the dots. It is nearly 50 years since someone tried, when historian Robert Blake wrote a book that discusses the office and its holders going back to the beginning.

We have biographers who dive down deep shafts into the ground to mine everything about an individual prime minister, but sometimes know little about who came before and after. History has become segmented by period and specialism. Some know a great deal about the early 18th century, or the mid-19th century, about economic or cultural history, but few take the long view. Rare are historians like Jeremy Black, or journalists like Daniel Finkelstein, who have a rich understanding of the entire 300 years of British prime ministers.

In place of a wide horizon, we have gone in for polls, plenty of them, ranking prime ministers from "first" to "last", as if they were artists whose work we can see now, or footballers who have scored a given number of goals. We attempt to determine a prime minister's "greatness". But great at what? Everyone knows about Winston Churchill's achievements. But what about William Pitt the Elder (PM from 1766–68) or Earl Grey (1830–34), both of whom were considerable figures. Polls are fun but we should not treat them as a substitute for serious analysis.

In the Radio 4 series that I'm presenting in April, and the book I'm writing to coincide with the anniversary, I have sought to answer seven questions – and I'll attempt to do so here in this feature. They are: (1) Why did the office emerge when it did in 1721, when Robert Walpole became Britain's first prime minister? (2) How has it survived for 300 years, the longest lasting democratic office in the modern world? (3) Is the job that Walpole was performing in 1721 the same as Boris Johnson in 2021? (4) Who have been the best prime ministers, and why? (5) When did the prime minister take over from the monarch as the most powerful figure in Britain, and from the foreign secretary as the key figure conducting foreign policy? (6) Why has the chancellor of the Exchequer emerged as the biggest challenger to the authority of the prime minister? And (7), how might the office of prime minister, and No 10, be strengthened as it enters its fourth century?

So why *did* the office emerge in 1721? When King George I asked Walpole to be First Lord of the Treasury and chancellor of the Exchequer in April 1721, no one at the time saw it as a major constitutional innovation. No one used the term "prime minister", except as a term of

abuse (because it seemed to usurp royal prerogative). It was to take two centuries before the office became a formalised part of the British constitution. Some historians have denied that 1721 was a significant milestone at all. This is understandable, but they are wrong to do so. Something of significant historical importance happened then, even if not apparent to contemporaries for many years.

Some see the office of prime minister dating back long before 1721. Chief ministers to the monarch had been strutting the corridors of power since the days of Dunstan, a powerful bishop who advised several English kings in the 10th century.

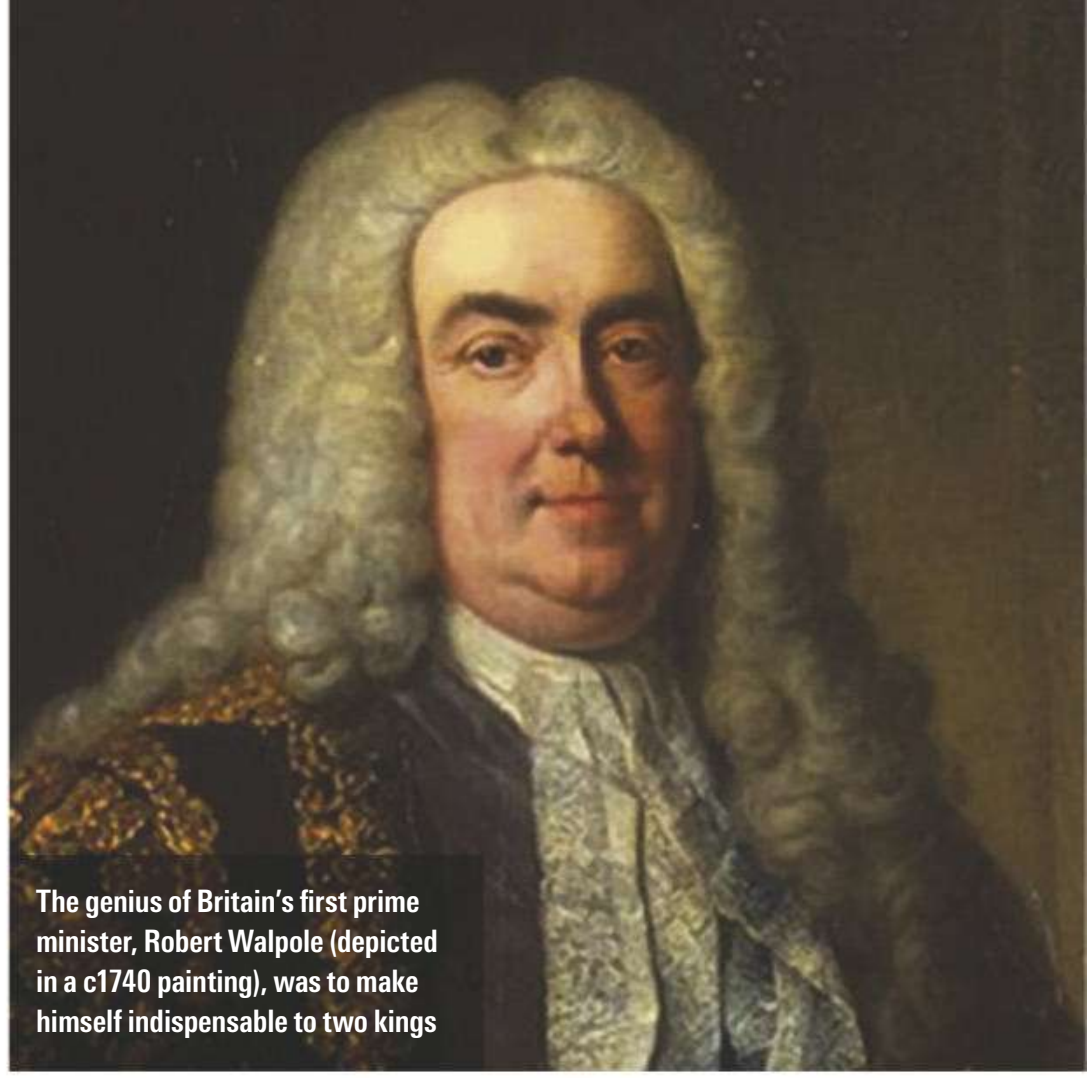
In the 16th century, Thomas Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell under Henry VIII, and William and Robert Cecil under Elizabeth I, had some of the attributes of the prime minister as the job emerged. They were clearly pre-eminent over all other figures in privy council and court. But they differed from the prime minister because their power rested wholly upon the monarch. By the mid-17th century, Oliver Cromwell was drawing his power from his command of the army. But the office that emerged after 1721 derived its authority from the monarch and *parliament*. The latter was critical to his powerbase, as Walpole understood.

It took the execution of Charles I in 1649, the Interregnum, then Restoration in 1660, and the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 to pave the way to the prime minister, as opposed to the chief minister. There was nothing inevitable about the emergence of the office. As the historian Diarmaid MacCulloch reminds us, were it not for the imposition of a Scottish king (James VI and I), a Dutch king (William III and II) and then the Hanoverians, the future of the constitution could have been very different .

King George III set out to dominate his prime ministers but the loss of America put paid to that

A series of Acts of Parliament after 1689 were all important in ensuring that Britain was to develop a constitutional rather than an absolute monarch, with parliament to meet every year, elections initially every three then every seven years, and the king dependent upon parliament for revenue. This required the king to have a figure in parliament who he could trust to ensure his legislation and financial bills passed. If it hadn't been for the infamous South Sea Bubble in 1720–21 (when the collapse of the South Sea Company stock ruined thousands of investors), the office might still not have emerged. George I, who became king in 1714, was heavily implicated in the affair, and he turned to the wily Walpole to steer and stabilise the country.

The survival of the office, our second question, was far from certain. A moment of high peril came in 1727, when King George was succeeded by his son George II, who turned to one of Walpole's rivals, Spencer Compton. Only when he proved incapable of commanding parliament did the second George turn back to Walpole, who cleverly exploited his position, not least ingratiating himself with the king's wife. Robert Walpole was nothing if not a seductive manipulator of people and money.



The genius of Britain's first prime minister, Robert Walpole (depicted in a c1740 painting), was to make himself indispensable to two kings

When Walpole was ousted from office in 1742, the position was more firmly embedded in the constitution, not least because he survived for 21 years, still the longest spell in the hot seat for a British PM. But it was to be another 40 years, and the arrival of William Pitt the Younger as prime minister, before the office truly stabilised. It is, to a large extent, thanks to Pitt's many qualities as a leader that the position of prime minster has survived its first 300 years.

Between Walpole and Pitt, the power of the nascent office of prime minister was threatened by the accession to the throne in 1760 of George III. Britain now had a monarch who wanted to claw back authority from parliament and politicians, to appoint the First Lord and subordinate ministers at will, to be the dominant voice in cabinet and to control policy.

We see this most clearly in the American War of Independence, when it was the king, and not Prime Minister Lord North, who drove the belligerent policy forward. The loss of the 13 colonies was a profound blow not just to Britain but to George himself, who seriously considered abdicating.

For the next serious military conflict, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, it was William Pitt in the driving seat, not George. The king's bouts of mental illness, and increasing fatigue, and his withdrawal from office in 1811, was another key moment in the emergence of the prime minister. The growing influence of political parties from the 1830s further consolidated the position of the prime minister, as the political head of their party.

For the Napoleonic Wars it was Prime Minister William Pitt, not George III, who was in the hot seat. There was no going back

ALAMY

There was to be no going back.

The genius of the landmark holders of the office was constantly to update the position of the prime minister within the body politic, and strengthen the powers of No 10 and the Cabinet Office, formed by Lloyd George in December 1916. The fact that no one has launched a successful invasion of mainland Britain since 1688, that there was no revolution, nor civil war (all of which would have swept the office aside), all counted. Loss of a major war might have done for the office of PM: had Britain been defeated in the First World War, the monarchy might have fallen, and quite probably the prime minister.

The survival of the office is all the more remarkable considering the profound changes that the role of prime minister has experienced. Walpole never visited Bristol, Manchester or Leeds, still less Wales or Scotland. Norfolk was his limit. He communicated and travelled at the speed of human legs and horses' hooves. Today, Boris Johnson travels almost at the speed of sound, and communicates at the speed of light. The coming of the telegraph, telephone, electricity, the railway, cars, jets and internet all profoundly changed the life of the prime minister.

So, given all the changes, is it still the same office, our third question? Walpole and Johnson have much in common. Like Walpole, Johnson is a chancer, who came to office on the back of high-stakes risks. Like his predecessor, on assuming the role, Johnson's primary task was to remain in office, and see off challengers, who were plentiful. Control of the media, in its very different forms, was and is a principal challenge and frustration for both Walpole and Johnson.

Johnson is First Lord of the Treasury, and ultimately responsible for the national finances and solvency. He is the nation's leader, tasked with keeping the country safe from threats abroad and within its own frontiers. The population looks to him, as well as to the monarch, for leadership and national unity. Again, these were all challenges faced by Britain's first prime minister in the 1720s and 30s.

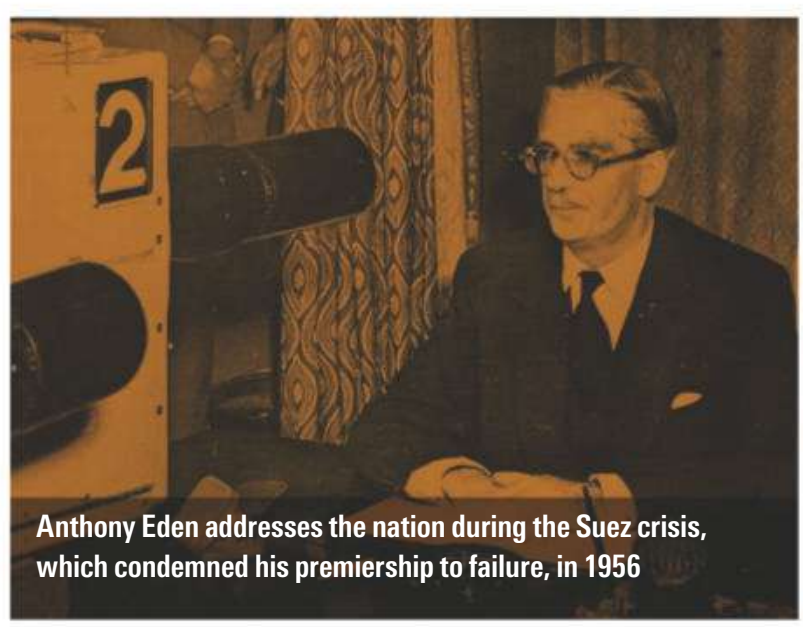
But which prime ministers have met these challenges most successfully? Of all our seven questions, that is surely the one that is asked most often. As opposed to the parlour game of picking the best and worst prime ministers, it is surely better to place prime ministers into different categories. "Agenda-changer" prime ministers made an enduring mark on the office and on policy, such that the successors either tried to be like them, or deliberately unlike them, but none were able to escape that shadow. They held the union together and enhanced its standing abroad. Only eight match this high standard: Walpole himself, Pitt the Younger, Robert Peel, Lord Palmerston, William Gladstone, David Lloyd George, Clement Attlee and Margaret Thatcher. That means that in the last 70 years, there's only been one such figure.

"Major influencers" come next, all of whom made a powerful impact on the country, like Winston Churchill, William Pitt the Elder, Benjamin Disraeli, Harold Wilson and Tony Blair, but who left little enduring mark on the office. "Stabiliser prime ministers" (such as the Earl of Derby and John Major) all served well, but, in part because of the lack of opportunity, such as a war or major disruption, or lack of talent, didn't significantly shift the dial.

"Noble" failures are leaders of integrity and ability, who

During his premiership, Lord Palmerston, shown addressing the Commons in 1860, vigorously asserted Britain's power overseas

Disraeli and Gladstone depicted as the Two Augurs in *Punch*, 1873. Only one qualifies as an "agenda-changing" PM, according to Anthony Seldon



Anthony Eden addresses the nation during the Suez crisis, which condemned his premiership to failure, in 1956

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

Nigel Lawson on budget day, 1984. Since the mid-1980s, successive chancellors have blocked and stymied their neighbour in Number 10

signally failed to achieve their mission, like Neville Chamberlain and Theresa May. "Ignoble" failures include Lord Melbourne (who spent far too much time fawning over Queen Victoria, and not enough trying to improve the lot of his fellow countrymen), and Anthony Eden, who shamed himself and the country over Suez in 1956.

Finally, there's a group of 12 who served for a year or less. This group includes some (like Lord Canning, who lasted just 119 days before dying) who could well have become significant prime ministers. So, too, could Spencer Perceval, assassinated after just three years, the only prime minister to suffer that fate.

As to why the prime minister took over from the monarch (our fifth question), this was a process that unfolded progressively over the centuries. Their position was immeasurably stronger relative to the monarchy in 1901 when Victoria died than it had been in 1837 when she assumed the throne.

Margaret Thatcher – one of Anthony Seldon's eight "agenda-changing" PMs – on the phone to Indira Gandhi, 1983

The growth of representative democracy was critical to legitimising the prime minister. Yet to dismiss the power and influence of the monarchy today – especially Elizabeth II, the best-known figure and the most photographed in the world – would be a mistake. The monarch is a much stronger symbol of national unity across the four nations, and throughout the Commonwealth than the political and transitory prime minister – a fact that's been evidenced on numerous occasions during the Covid-19 crisis.

Over the past three centuries, the British foreign secretary has gradually lost power to the head of government. Technology has made such a development all but inevitable. By the time of the First World War, the prime minister could follow in real time and direct operations on the battlefield in a way that Pitt the Younger and Lord Liverpool could never have done 100 years earlier. For decades now, the prime minister has merely had to pick up the phone to speak to the president of the United States and other key global figures.

Every PM since 1945 has left the building at a time not of their own choosing, through election defeat, cabinet revolt or ill-health

While the foreign secretary has fallen in power, the chancellor of the Exchequer (our sixth question) has seen his (it always has been a man) power wax. Since the 1980s, when Nigel Lawson was chancellor, they have increasingly challenged, threatened and ignored the prime minister. Tony Blair's premiership would have been utterly different if he had not been constantly blocked by Gordon Brown as chancellor, as Theresa May's would have been had it not been for her chancellor, Philip Hammond.

Every prime minister since 1945 has left the building at a time not of their own choosing, through election defeat, cabinet revolt or (as was the case with Harold Wilson in 1976) ill-health. None left with their agendas completed. What might then be done to strengthen the office of prime minister, and No 10 (our final question), as we enter the fourth century?

The prime minister and senior posts in No 10 have been overwhelmingly white, middle-class, male and from the south-east of England. Walpole and Johnson studied in the same classrooms, slept in the same bedrooms, and played in the same fields at Eton. No 10 has been full of cronies, with open selection criteria rejected in favour of mates being brought in looking and sounding like the prime minister. More women, people from BAME backgrounds, and people with regional accents are urgently needed.

Prime ministers have – for much of the office's 300-year history – been vastly overworked, with little time for parliament, visiting the four nations, meeting people, going to the theatre, or even seeing the country at play. We expect so much of them, expectations that they themselves encourage, not least with their hyperbolic statements on the doorstep when they enter the building. Disappointment is inevitable. But change is needed. The frequently impressive record of the German chancellor since 1945 shows how different it could be.

We need to create the opportunity for the often highly talented figures who rise to the top of the British political system to leave No 10 on their final day, not in tears, but with their heads held as high as they were on their first entry. H

GETTY IMAGES

Anthony Seldon's latest book, *The Impossible Office? The History of the British Prime Minister*, is published by CUP in April. His BBC Radio 4 series *The Prime Minister at 300* is airing now and available via BBC Sounds

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Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Medieval maps are often illustrated with strange sea creatures. What are they supposed to represent?

Medieval European maps differ from modern charts in several significant respects. They're rarely orientated north–south – most have east at the top. Their descriptions of landmasses and their sense of scale are also different yet, curiously, not entirely dissimilar to the northern hemisphere as seen on Google Earth. And the oceans, too, look unfamiliar, often populated with extraordinary creatures.

On the world map in the 11th-century manuscript *Saint-Sever Beatus*, for example, the ocean that encircles Asia, Africa and Europe teems with giant fish. And on the 14th-century English Gough Map, fish as large as Orkney swim off the coast of Scotland. More than merely helping the viewer to distinguish between land and sea, these creatures signify the abundance of life (and food) in the oceans, while also acknowledging the awesome scale of animals such as basking sharks and whales.

Sea creatures depicted on other maps tap into the classical monster repertoire. On the Hereford Map of the World, made c1300, a fish labelled "soldier of the sea" swims in the Mediterranean, alongside a siren with a mirror, combing her hair; elsewhere on the chart, Scylla's roaring head and the whirlpool-monster Charybdis evoke the tale of Odysseus.

Medieval viewers might also have recognised the prophet Jonah, swallowed by a whale but delivered safely to shore, or perhaps a bestiary's (an illustrated volume about animals and other natural phenomena) account of fish so large they are mistaken for islands by hapless sailors.

There is no single meaning of the sea creatures on medieval maps. Rather, they evoke a sense of wonder at the immensity of the oceans and their mysterious, mythically charged inhabitants.

Alixe Bovey, specialist in the art and culture of the Middle Ages and deputy director of the Courtauld Institute of Art

A page from a medieval bestiary shows sailors mistaking a huge fish for land. Sea creatures were staples of maps in the Middle Ages

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DID YOU KNOW...?

Sticky fingers

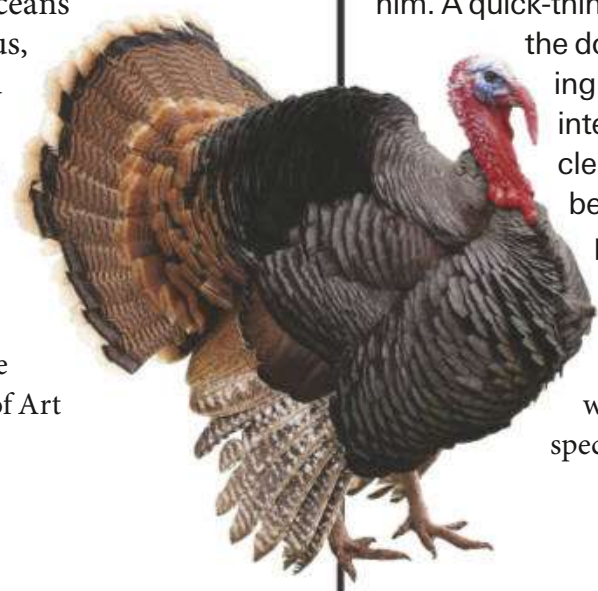
George Washington's wallet was stolen in 1992 – nearly 200 years after the first president's death. The brown leather wallet, which had a brass clasp inscribed "GW 1775", was on display in the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton, New Jersey. At that time, security was possibly less than tight, and someone walked off with it. Three weeks later the wallet was returned, via a lawyer's office – undamaged, but missing a 1779 dollar bill and a rare 66 cents bill from 1776.

Rule Britannia

Following the Royal Navy's victory at the battle of the Nile in 1798, the sculptor John Flaxman proposed that the triumph be commemorated with a 70-metre (230-foot) figure of Britannia in Greenwich Park, London. His friend William Blake provided an illustration to show how it might look in situ, and the sculptor confidently predicted that it would "last as long as the Trajan Column, the amphitheatre or the pyramids of Egypt". Sadly, few people shared his enthusiasm, and Britannia was never built.

Talking turkey

A 19th-century Irish landowner believed that a turkey-cock on his farm was the reincarnation of his father. Adolphus Cooke's insistence that the bird was treated with great respect by all who worked there was not his only eccentricity. He once sentenced his red setter to death by hanging, after it refused to obey him. A quick-thinking servant saved the dog's life by claiming that the turkey had intervened to beg for clemency. Cooke believed him, and pardoned the disobedient dog.



Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

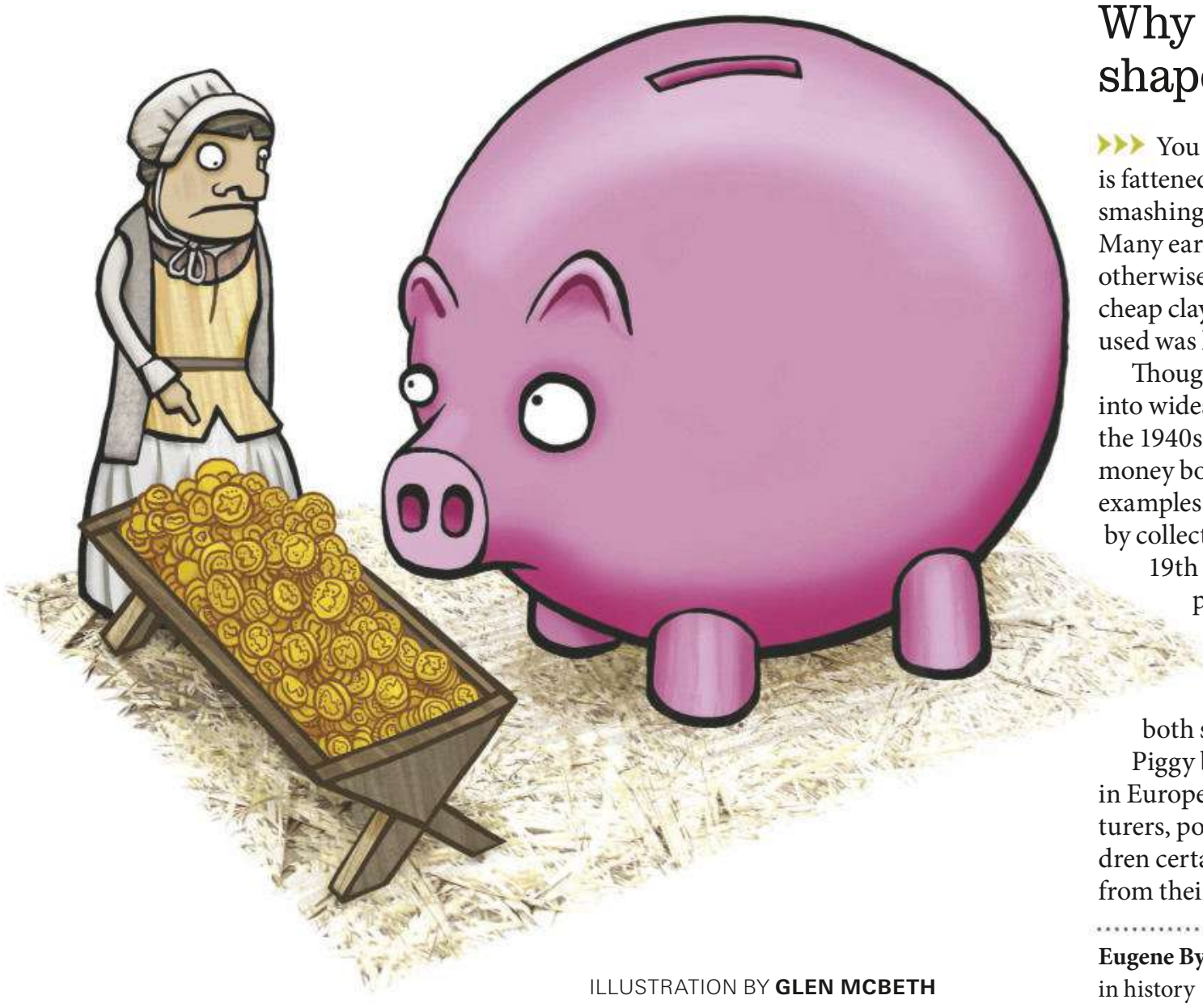


ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN MCBETH**

Why are money boxes shaped like pigs?

You fatten your piggy bank just as a pig is fattened in anticipation of a feast – and smashing it open is a kind of ritual slaughter. Many early money boxes – pig-shaped or otherwise – were eminently smashable, being cheap clay items; intriguingly, one clay type used was known in England as "pygg".

Though the term "piggy bank" only came into widespread use in British newspapers in the 1940s, china or other pottery pig-shaped money boxes pre-dated that period. Some examples were among the "penny toys" bought by collector Ernest King in London in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were popular in Java, Indonesia from at least the 12th century, and archaeologists found a 13th-century example from Germany – two cultures that both saw pigs as symbols of good fortune.

Piggy banks seem to have been popularised in Europe by 19th-century German manufacturers, possibly after the Dutch – whose children certainly had them – imported the idea from their colony in Indonesia.

Eugene Byrne, author and journalist specialising in history

In the Second World War, what happened to ambassadors after their homeland declared war on the country in which they were based?

In theory, this scenario was covered by the Havana Convention of 1928, which regulated the rights and duties of diplomatic officers. On the declaration of war, diplomatic relations between the two countries would be frozen, and their respective consular staffs and their families would be given the time and means to return to their home countries. This, certainly, was the experience of the British ambassador to Berlin, Sir Nevile Henderson, who delivered Britain's declaration of war to the Nazi leadership on 3 September 1939. In the days that followed, he and his staff were safely dispatched to Rotterdam in a sealed train. The experience of the then French ambassador to Berlin, Robert Coulondre, was similarly positive.

The process didn't always go so smoothly. In some cases it was prudent for the ambassador to be tactically absent, as were both the Soviet and German ambassadors to Poland in September 1939. Moreover, the Havana Convention was signed only by the American states, so was little more than advisory elsewhere. Consequently, when the German ambassador to the USSR, Count Fritz-Werner von der Schulenburg, announced his country's invasion of the USSR in June 1941, he swiftly found himself imprisoned; he was released only in exchange for the Soviet ambassador to Berlin, Vladimir Dekanozov.

In short, until the Vienna Convention of 1961, there was no legally binding regulation governing the treatment of diplomats in the event of hostilities. Although ambassadors and their staffs might reasonably expect fair treatment, circumstances or mutual antagonisms could easily intervene. H

Roger Moorhouse, historian and author specialising in the Second World War

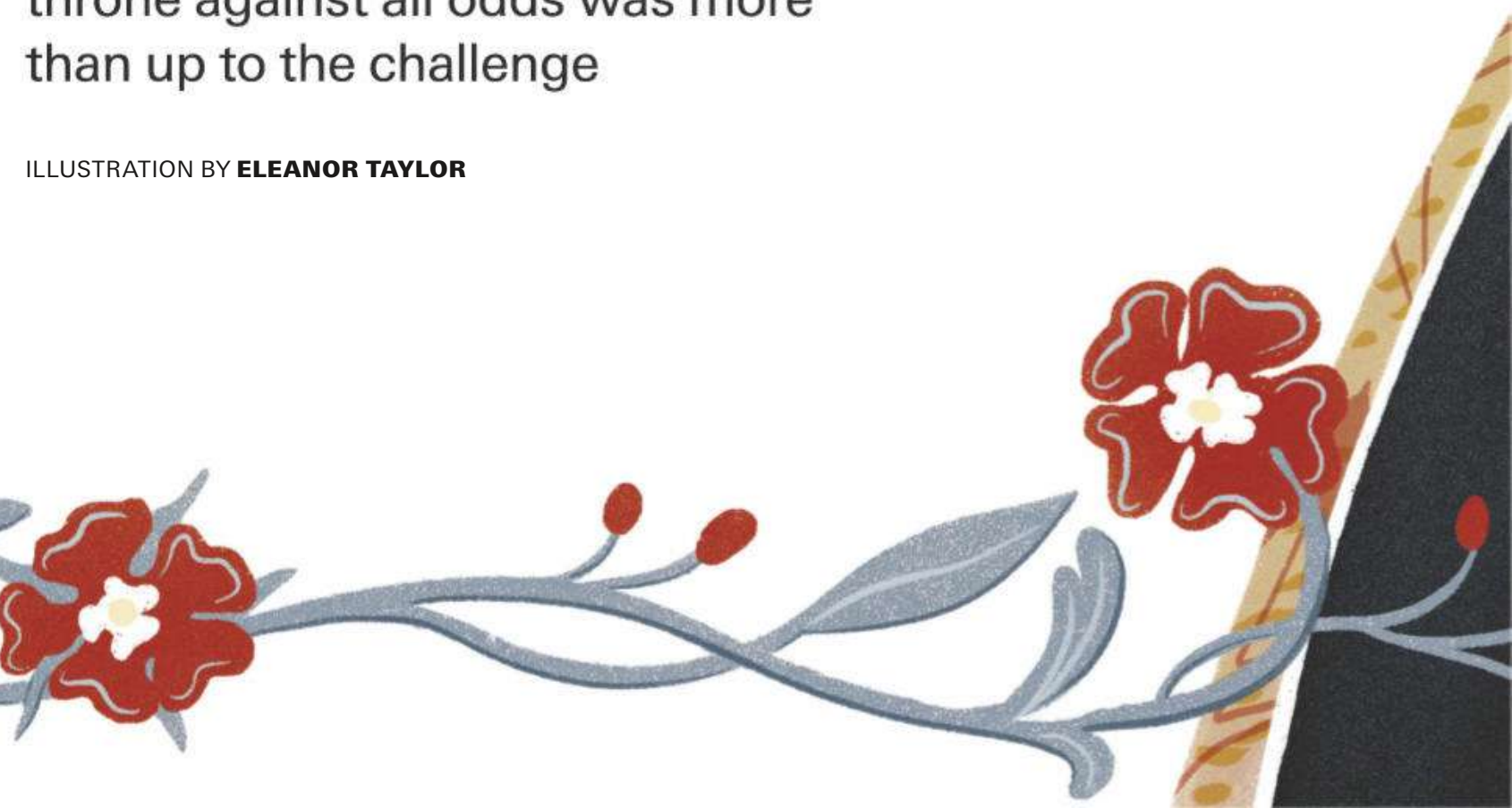
TOPFOTO

Sir Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador to Berlin, meets Adolf Hitler in 1939. He and his staff left Germany safely when war was declared

The greatest pretender

Few English kings were assailed by as many rival claimants to their crown as Henry VII. Yet, as **Nathen Amin** describes, the man who had himself seized the throne against all odds was more than up to the challenge

ILLUSTRATION BY **ELEANOR TAYLOR**



Henry VII is a king often overlooked, his legacy overshadowed by those whose reigns bookended his: the much-debated Richard III and the larger-than-life Henry VIII. The enduring image of the first Tudor monarch is of a tight-fisted miser – a dreary accountant king who presided over a dark and tedious regime until his powerhouse of a son took the reins and really shook things up. Yet the reign of Henry VII was replete with drama, intrigue and conspiracy, as a series of pretenders threatened to drive him from his hard-won throne before he could even settle in.

To appreciate the first Tudor king's issues with pretenders, we must first understand his own unlikely rise to the throne. Henry was born in Pembroke Castle on 28 January 1457, son of Margaret Beaufort, an English heiress of royal descent, and Edmund Tudor, a half-Welsh, half-French earl who had died three months earlier. Though his lineage included links with English, Welsh, French and Bavarian royalty, at the time of his birth Henry was just another noble mouth to feed, and certainly not a king in the making.

Despite being just a child during the early phases of the Wars of the Roses, Henry was closely associated with the House of Lancaster. His half-uncle on his father's side was King Henry VI, whose most ardent followers included the boy's paternal uncle, Jasper Tudor, and his maternal Beaufort relations.

A series of battles between 1459 and 1471 accompanied significant political upheaval in England; the feeble Henry VI was deposed twice during this time by Edward of York (who reigned as Edward IV). By the end of May 1471, Henry VI and his sole heir, Prince Edward, were dead, and the male line of the Lancastrian-descended Beauforts had been wiped out. The upshot was that Henry Tudor, now 14 years old and previously little regarded, became viewed by the Yorkist crown as a potential threat to be neutralised.

At birth, Henry was just another noble mouth to feed – certainly not a king in the making

To capture a king
Henry VI is taken captive after the battle of Northampton in 1460. As a half-nephew of the Lancastrian king, Henry Tudor was viewed as a threat to the Yorkist cause

Escape to victory

Fearing that death awaited his young nephew, Jasper Tudor acted with haste. Seizing Henry, he fled from their Yorkist pursuers through south Wales, navigating a series of underground tunnels beneath Tenby to reach a modest vessel on which they sailed for the continent. Henry spent the next 14 years in exile, anxiously peering over his shoulder for Yorkist assassins.

It was only after the death of Edward IV in 1483 that this largely unknown earl from Wales was recast as a potential English king. Dissident Yorkists alienated by rumours that Richard III had murdered Edward's sons, the ill-fated princes in the Tower, turned their gaze across the Channel to the man who would become Henry VII. Amplifying his maternal descent from Edward III through the Beaufort line, they launched a bid to convert him into an acceptable candidate for the throne.

If a pretender is defined as "a person who claims or aspires to a title or position that someone else holds", then nobody encapsulated that concept better than Henry Tudor in 1483. In the words of one perceptive foreign commentator, he was a man "without

Rival claimants
A portrait of Henry VII (left). Perkin Warbeck (right), Lambert Simnel (far right) and Edward, Earl of Warwick (below, right) all gave the king cause to look over his shoulder during his reign

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY/GETTY

Blood claim George, Duke of Clarence, brother of Edward IV and Richard III. George's son Edward, Earl of Warwick became the focus of a Yorkist plot to reverse Henry VII's victory at Bosworth

power, without money, without right to the crown of England, and without any reputation but what his person and deportment obtained for him".

Following his victory over Richard III at Bosworth Field in 1485, Henry wasted little time in being crowned king in Westminster Abbey, before marrying Elizabeth of York and symbolically uniting the warring houses of York and Lancaster. Soon, the new queen was pregnant with an heir. After 30 years of vicious conflict, England, it seemed, was finally at peace.

Yet, as Henry's court historian Polydore Vergil noted, the new king soon "began to be harassed by the treachery of his opponents and, assaulted frequently thereafter by the forces of his enemies and the insurrections of his own subjects, he evaded peril not without effort". This was a pointed reference to the emergence of two pretenders who threatened the stability of the fledgling Tudor crown, and the fact that Henry enjoyed anything but universal support early in his reign.

By 1486 it was generally presumed that the children of Edward IV had been killed, their demise paving the way for the Tudor accession. Yet a third Yorkist prince remained alive, albeit under lock and key in the Tower of London. The 11-year-old Edward, 17th Earl of Warwick, was the only surviving son of George, Duke of Clarence – scheming brother of Edward IV and Richard III,

Bride across the divide Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV and sister of the princes in the Tower. Her marriage to Henry VII in 1486 was intended to unify the houses of York and Lancaster

executed for treason in 1478.

With his royal blood, Warwick became a figurehead for a small band of Yorkist insurgents who sought to reverse the outcome of Bosworth. As a captive of the Tudor king, Warwick could not actually front any rebellion, so a surrogate was found: the boy later named as Lambert Simnel.

When Henry VII uncovered the conspiracy, he had the real Warwick paraded in London to prove that the Yorkists' claimant was an imposter – but even that failed to stop the plot from gaining traction in Ireland. Of particular concern to Henry was the defection of John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, Warwick's cousin and himself a potential Yorkist candidate for the throne. Lincoln lent the plot some degree of credibility. He also brought with him the support, money and mercenaries of his aunt Margaret of York, Dowager Duchess of Burgundy.

Simnel was crowned "Edward, King of England" in Dublin's Holy Trinity Cathedral on 24 May 1487. Within weeks, a largely Irish army landed in Lancashire, bolstered by some German troops and a handful of English Yorkists.

Henry VII moved decisively to confront the threat. On 16 June 1487, his army met the invading force at Stoke Field in Nottinghamshire where, one chronicler noted, "both sides fought with the bitterest energy". Unlike at Bosworth, the might of the royal army made

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY/GETTY

headway, and the ill-equipped rebels were "stricken down and slain like dull and brute beasts". Lincoln was killed and the pretender captured. The Tudor crown was saved.

In the investigation that followed, royal officials revealed the identity of the boy to whom the rebels had rallied as the 10-year-old son of Thomas Simnel, an Oxford joiner. It's been suggested that the name "Lambert Simnel" was an eccentric invention designed to hide his true royal lineage, but there is ample evidence that the given name Lambert was in use in 15th-century England. Lambert Fossdyke was abbot of Croyland Abbey in 1484, for example, and the chancery rolls contain references to Lambert Brancaster, Lambert Salter and Lambert Pevy. Similarly, the surname Simnel had precedents: a Roger Symnell, a Richard Symnel and, pertinently, a Thomas Simnel of Oxford can be traced.

What of the boy's fate? As a mere child who had little influence in the plot, Henry VII ruled him to be just an "innocent lad" who was "too young to have committed any offence" himself. So the king put Lambert Simnel to work in the royal kitchens; he was later promoted to train Henry's hawks. We know that he was still alive more than 40 years after the plot, though he maintained a low profile for the remainder of his life.

Curious glances

Henry VII's troubles did not end with victory at Stoke Field. During the winter of 1491, a remarkably well-dressed figure with a sharp mind and flowing blond locks confidently glided through the streets of Cork, Ireland. The young man, then in his mid-teens, arrived suddenly and without warning, attracting curious glances with every step. Rumours quickly circulated that he was the bastard son of Richard III. Then the claims were adjusted, and word spread that he was in fact Richard of York, younger son of Edward IV, presumed dead for the past eight years.

This second pretender, remembered by history as Perkin Warbeck, was quickly lauded by a small group of agitators as the rightful king. However, he found support among the Irish hard to command, and accepted an invitation to France, then in a state of war with England. Henry VII had himself risen to power through the agency of the French crown, so was acutely aware that foreign meddling could trigger a change of incumbent on the English throne.

Rather than waiting for a second invasion, Henry went on the offensive, crossing the Channel in October 1492 at the head of what was probably the largest English army of the 15th century. There were other reasons for the invasion besides the plot, but during negotiations with the French king one of Henry's main demands was Warbeck's expulsion from France. This was agreed – but the conspiracy was far from over.

A great "aunt"
Margaret of York, sister of Edward IV and Richard III. She supported claims to the crown by two men purporting to be her nephews – but to no avail

Only one man emerged victorious from these years of strife – Henry, the original pretender

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Warbeck now sought refuge in Flanders at the court of his "aunt", Margaret of York. Margaret had freely given support to Simnel without ever meeting him and now, having encountered Warbeck in person, she rallied to his cause. Tudor chroniclers treated this warm reception with scorn, Vergil declaring that "so great was her pleasure that her happiness seemed to have disturbed the balance of her mind".

Margaret even wrote on her new protégé's behalf to Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, claiming that "when I gazed on this only male Remnant of our family – who had come through so many perils and misfortunes – I was deeply moved, and out of this natural affection, into which both necessity and the rights of blood were drawing me, I embraced him as my only nephew and my only son". It was to no avail: the Spanish monarchs dismissed her claims.

Warbeck was able to raise a modest army in Flanders and, in the summer of 1495, sailed to England in a bid to win his supposed birthright. His claim to be the son of a popular Yorkist king, however, proved of little merit to a dubious audience. When Warbeck's men landed at Deal in Kent, they were ambushed by the local populace and slain, while the pretender looked on aghast from his ship. Raising anchor, Warbeck sailed to Ireland, where he was likewise rebuffed by the people of Waterford. In November he surfaced in Scotland, where the ambitious young King James IV was enthusiastic about war with England. Using Warbeck's cause as justification, James called Henry VII "our extreme and mortal enemy".

In September 1496, Warbeck once more attempted to enter England, this time from the north. Just as in Kent, however, this second invasion proved to be a humiliating farce. Shocked by the ferocity of border warfare, and alarmed at the lack of support for his cause, Warbeck fled from the front lines on the first day. Having squandered the support provided by James IV, Warbeck quietly left Scotland the following summer. But in September 1497 he arrived in Cornwall to chance one final throw of the dice.

The Cornish had recently risen in rebellion against Henry VII and, having been crushed at the battle of Blackheath, were simmering in resentment. It was this anger, not the strength of Warbeck's claim to the throne, that drew them to his colours. His meagre numbers bolstered by a modest array of vengeful Cornishmen, Warbeck marched through the West Country with intent. Upon reaching Taunton, however, word arrived

BRIDGEMAN

THE WAR THAT ROSE FROM THE DEAD

The battle of Bosworth is often regarded as the end point of the Wars of the Roses. But, argues Nathen Amin, the conflict rumbled on for another 20 years

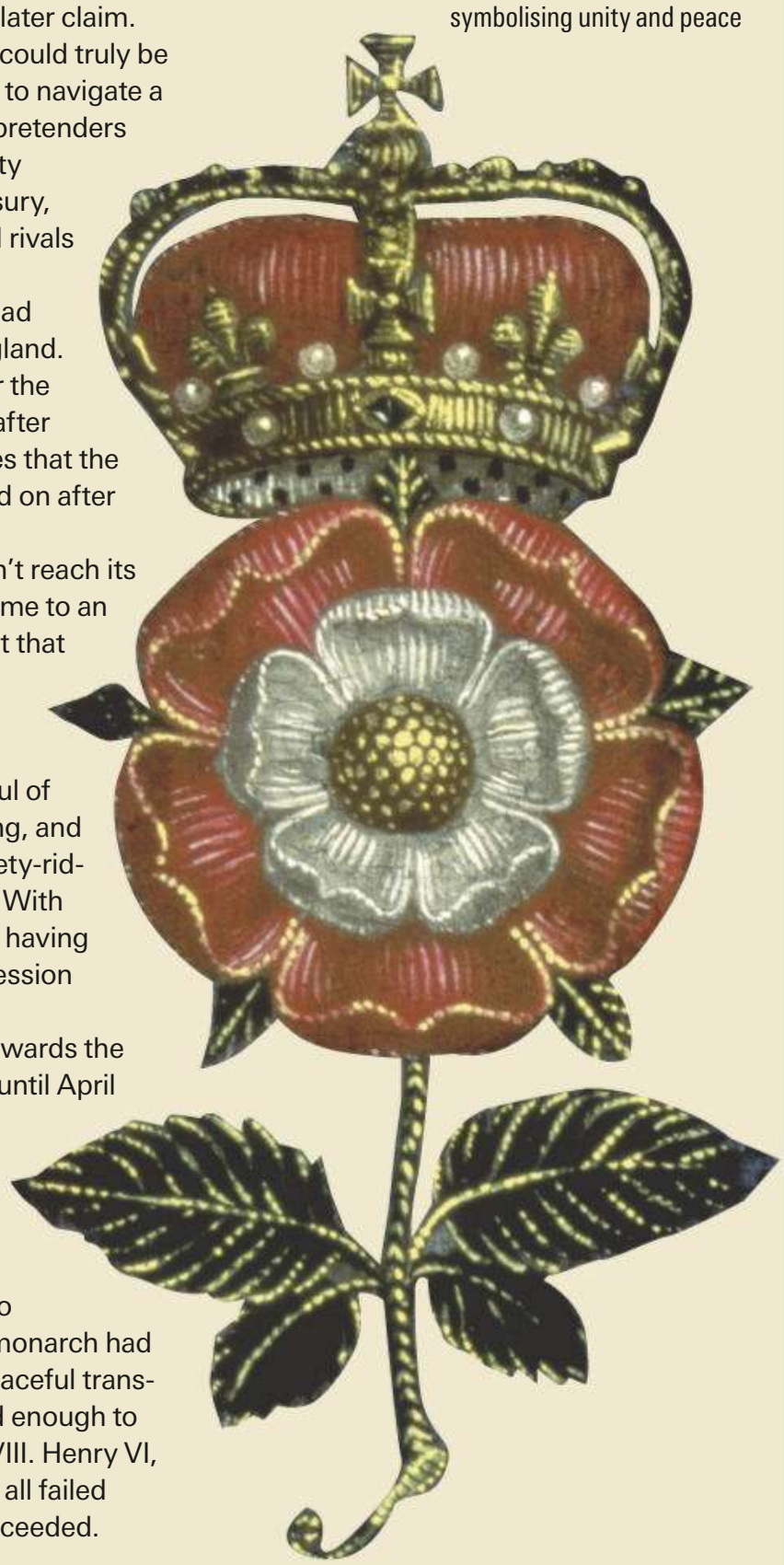
On wresting the crown from Richard III at Bosworth in 1485, Henry VII sought to present himself as the unity candidate – the man chosen by God to reconcile the houses of York and Lancaster. Three decades of chaos and bloodletting were over – or so Henry hoped. The new king even adopted as his emblem the red rose, a little-known Lancastrian badge. This was combined with the white rose of his Yorkist-descended wife, Elizabeth, to create a double rose – a very visual symbol of reconciliation, peace and harmony.

Yet victory at Bosworth in 1485 did not bring to England "smooth-faced peace, with smiling aplenty and fair prosperous days", as Shakespeare would later claim. Before the Wars of the Roses could truly be brought to a close, Henry had to navigate a tricky reign, crushing Yorkist pretenders and rebels, subduing a haughty nobility, replenishing the treasury, and outwitting his continental rivals to prevent the kind of foreign-backed deposition that had befallen previous kings of England. That a fierce pitched battle for the crown was fought two years after Bosworth at Stoke Field proves that the Wars of the Roses smouldered on after the demise of Richard III.

So if this long civil war didn't reach its climax in 1485, when did it come to an end? There is a solid argument that the wars concluded only with the death of Henry VII. The final years of his reign were tough for those subjects fearful of falling foul of an avaricious king, and for the monarch himself, anxiety-ridden over his dynasty's future. With only one male heir – two sons having already died – the Tudor succession rested on fragile foundations.

Despite myriad illnesses towards the end of his life, Henry VII lived until April 1509, by which point his handsome, strong and scholarly heir was 17 years old and on the cusp of adulthood. By fending off his adversaries, Henry was able to accomplish what no English monarch had achieved for decades – the peaceful transferral of his crown to a son old enough to rule without a regent: Henry VIII. Henry VI, Edward IV and Richard III had all failed where the first Tudor king succeeded.

Despite attempts by historians to draw a line under the Wars of the Roses after Bosworth Field, this acrimonious conflict between implacable factions only truly ended with the accession of the popular, part-Lancastrian, part-Yorkist Henry VIII. As the poet John Skelto put it around the time of the younger Henry's coronation: "The Rose both white and red, In one rose now doth grow."



New rose
Henry VII combined the red of Lancaster with the white of York to create the double Tudor rose, symbolising unity and peace

BRIDGEMAN

that a formidable royal army was heading in their direction, fronted by an armour-clad king. Rather than stand and fight, Warbeck lost his nerve and surrendered.

As with Simnel, Henry granted Warbeck his life – though, following a failed escape attempt, the latter was imprisoned in the Tower of London. Seventeen months later, Warbeck was accused of conspiring with the Earl of Warwick, sealing both their fates. On 23 November 1499, Perkin Warbeck was hanged like a commoner at Tyburn, his body then hastily buried in an unmarked grave. Warwick was beheaded on Tower Hill.

Compassionate assassin

One question has captivated historians over the five centuries since these events unfolded: was Warbeck truly the prince he claimed to be? During his time at large, the story peddled by "Prince Richard" was that, while his brother Edward V was "miserably put to death", the younger boy had been permitted to escape by a compassionate assassin. In a frustratingly vague account, he gave no indication who it was that ordered his brother's murder, and mentioned no names or dates that can be corroborated.

After his capture, however, Warbeck confessed to being an imposter from Tournai, son of John Osbeck rather than Edward IV; tellingly, he confirmed this story on the gallows, moments before his death. This revelation has been questioned by some, who consider that it was contrived by the Tudor regime. However, there is an abundance of evidence in the Tournai historical record to support its accuracy, and independent investigations conducted by the French and Spanish also concluded that he was a fraud.

In the end, however, Warbeck's identity matters not. Only one man emerged victorious from these years of strife – the original pretender, Henry VII. Between 1485 and 1499, Henry had invaded England, seized the crown in battle, married the princess, established a thriving dynasty, replenished the treasury, earned continental recognition from his peers and the papacy, suppressed a Cornish rebellion, and vanquished two serious challenges for his throne.

When later describing the character of Henry VII, Polydore Vergil noted how "his spirit was distinguished, wise and prudent; his mind was brave and resolute and never, even at moments of the greatest danger, deserted him". It seems an apt summary of the greatest pretender of them all. H

Nathen Amin is an author and historical researcher. His latest book is *Henry VII and the Tudor Pretenders: Simnel, Warbeck and Warwick* (Amberley, 2021)

NAPO

Napoleon from new angles
LEFT TO RIGHT: The carved eaglet that watched over Napoleon's son in his cradle; an 1812 portrait of the emperor; the revolutionary cockade pinned to his bicorne hat. Objects such as these help illustrate Napoleon's meteoric rise and fall

ALAMY

LEON

A LIFE IN OBJECTS

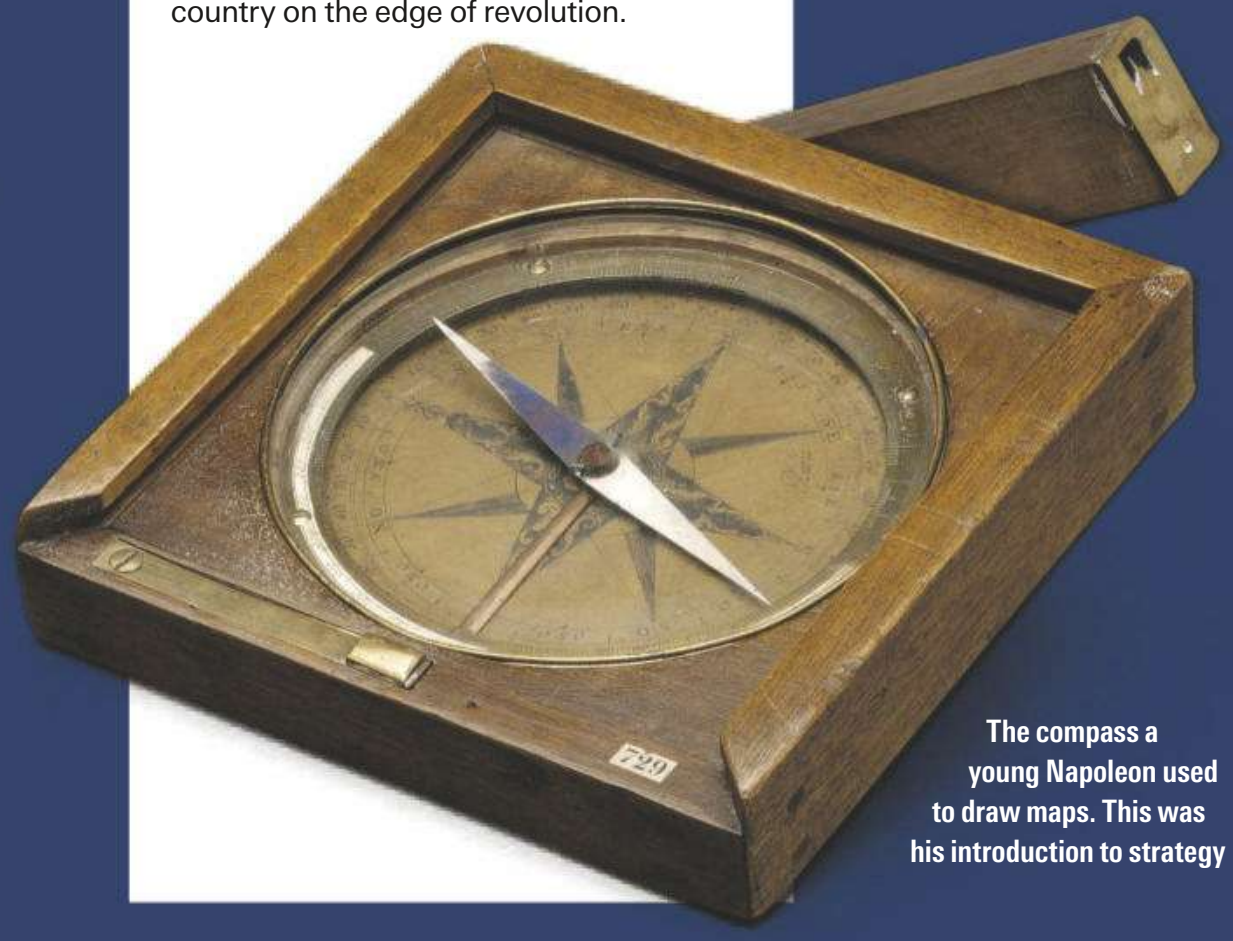
Two hundred years after his death,
Nicole Cochrane and **Emma Butcher**
examine 10 objects that offer us a fresh
perspective on the French emperor

1

Solitary school days

Napoleon's school compass (below) is a reminder of the rudimentary beginnings of his career. Made from wood, copper and leather, it was his introduction to strategy, used in map drawing and fortification classes. Napoleon, who was born on 15 August 1769, attended *École Royale Militaire* in Brienne as a new member of the French nobility – his Corsican family were elevated in status after the country's invasion by the French, as his father had swapped sides and supported the attackers. Fiercely patriotic of his Corsican heritage, Napoleon had a deep connection to home, writing to his mother: "I hasten to testify to you the love that inspires in me the kindness that you have had for us."

Throughout his education, Napoleon was a solitary creature, reflecting later in life: "I lived like a bear in a little room, with my books for my only friends." He learnt gentlemanly pursuits such as Latin, mathematics, fencing and dancing. In his own time, he began work on historical and philosophical essays, even beginning a gothic novel: "O horror! The countess's fingers sank into his broad wounds and came out covered with blood." Despite his authorial ambitions, however, he ultimately settled on the path his family set for him. A life in the military lay before him, in a country on the edge of revolution.



The compass a young Napoleon used to draw maps. This was his introduction to strategy

2

Rising star of the revolution

"The Bat" was Napoleon's battlefield nickname, inspired by his hat's bat-like silhouette. He always carried 12 bicorne hats with him, specifically tailored to be unusually *en bataille* (with corns parallel to the shoulders) rather than *en colonne*, with the corns perpendicular, as was the fashion for most of his officers.

As well as a fashion statement, the hat was Napoleon's homage to his early revolutionary ideals. The red, white and blue cockade, the only flourish to adorn it, was the symbol of the French Revolution, of the everyman and his revolutionary yearning for democracy and liberty.

When the revolution had begun, Napoleon, four years out of military school,

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One of Napoleon's bicorne hats, adorned with his customary red, white and blue cockade. This signified his revolutionary ideals

GETTY IMAGES

fervently embraced its ideals, eventually becoming president of the Jacobin Club, the most famous political revolutionary group. He also rose quickly through the French military ranks, even capturing the attention of Robespierre's brother, who claimed he showed "transcendent merit".

Despite the ever-changing seas of France's political allegiances, Napoleon kept its revolutionary principles with him. As he built his empire, he was determined to cultivate a "man of the people" image. Thus the cockade was a conscious fashion statement to his loyal troops, signifying that Napoleon promised to serve them, and deliver France justice.

The frontispiece of the first volume of *Description of Egypt*, a comprehensive survey of the country. The research for this book was conducted during Napoleon's military campaign

3 Enthralled by Egypt

Napoleon thought of Egypt as the "geographical key to the world". In 1798 and 1799 he led a campaign through Egypt and Syria to protect French trade interests, undermine the British and to enforce a colonial presence in the Middle East. The invasion was also Napoleon's attempt to craft his image in that of his military heroes, particularly Alexander the Great, who had forged a sprawling empire through conquest.

Alongside his military force was also a group of 167 academics, scientists, geographers, artists, engineers and musicians. As members of the Commission of Sciences and Arts, their goal was to record a comprehensive survey of Egypt, bringing cultural and scientific flair to the campaign. The *Description of Egypt* (published 1809–29) was a series of works that were illustrated with plates of the archaeological sites, antiquities, maps and ecology of Egypt. (The frontispiece of the first volume is shown above.) These eye-catching plates sparked European interest in what would become the discipline of Egyptology.

Napoleon was also interested in excavating and looting ancient Egyptian sites. These stolen artefacts, such as the Rosetta Stone, would be seized by the British after Napoleon's defeat at the battle of the Nile – potent symbols of the way Europe exploited ancient Egypt for national pride.

4 Crowned in glory

Napoleon made himself emperor of the French on 2 December 1804 in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris. Spectators watched as he was anointed by Pope Pius VII and then lifted a crown, made of gold laurel leaves, above his own head – the self-made man became the self-crowned king.

His crown had proved problematic, however. Composed of 44 laurel leaves, 12 smaller leaves and 42 seeds, it was too heavy to be worn during the coronation, and six leaves were removed to make it more bearable. The goldsmith who created it, Martin Guillaume Biennais, reportedly gave his daughters the six leaves – one of which (above) went to auction in 2017 and fetched €625,000, or around £540,000. This is the only leaf whose whereabouts we know of today: the other five are lost, and the crown itself was melted down.

The laurel crown was a symbol of military power and imperial triumph in the ancient world and, by wearing one, Napoleon hoped to emulate the Roman emperors he admired. A second crown, called the "Crown of Charlemagne", was designed in the medieval style of the famed ruler. These two crowns were visual emblems of Napoleon's reign: he was portraying himself as the inheritor of ancient power and medieval grandeur, heralding a new imperial era for France and the empire he had helped to shape.

A gold laurel leaf from one of Napoleon's crowns. It sold at auction in 2017 for more than half a million euros

PHILIPPE WOJAZER-REUTERS

5 Desperate for an heir

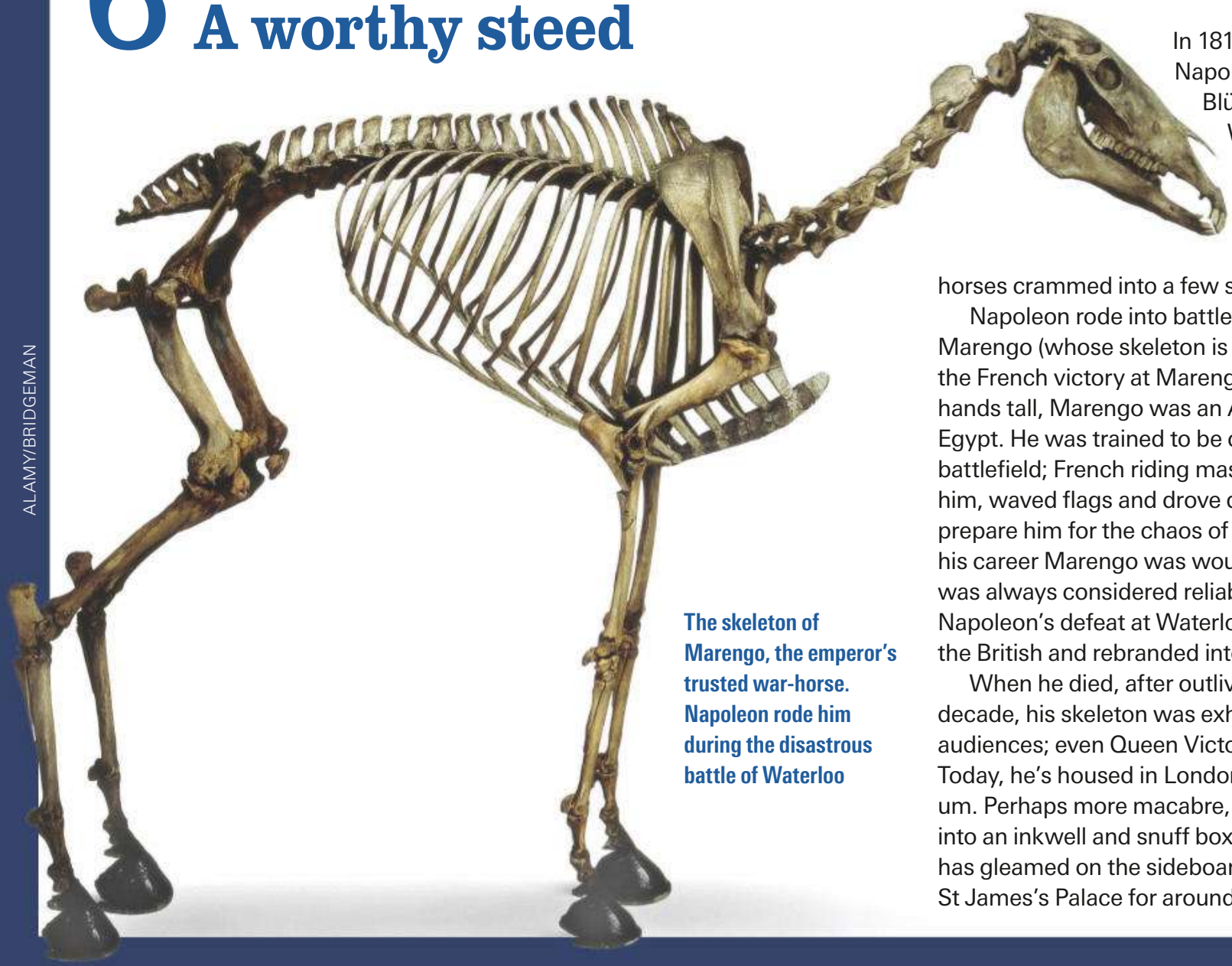
One of Napoleon's chief concerns after he had established an empire was finding a way to secure it. He needed a legitimate male heir. Despite their passionate 14-year love affair, in 1809 the emperor had his marriage to Josephine de Beauharnais annulled. His dynastic hopes were placed on his second wife, the Austrian archduchess Marie Louise, eldest daughter of Francis II of Austria, whom he married in 1810. On 20 March 1811, the couple welcomed a son, named Napoleon François Joseph Charles Bonaparte, and proclaimed "King of Rome" in the tradition of the Holy Roman Empire.

This elaborate cradle was gifted to the infant prince by the city of Paris and was adorned with meaningful symbols – the baby watched over by an eaglet and the winged goddess of victory. Napoleon doted on his son, nicknamed "the Eaglet". His private secretary, Baron De Meneval, wrote that "sometimes, dismissing the great thoughts that occupied his mind, [Napoleon] would lie down on the floor beside his cherished son, playing with him like another child".

After Napoleon's first exile, to the island of Elba, his wife and young son fled to Austria; he would never see them again. In Austria the younger Napoleon was given the nickname "Franz" and tragically died of tuberculosis aged just 21.

The intricately carved cradle that was given to Napoleon's infant son and heir

6 A worthy steed



ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

The skeleton of Marengo, the emperor's trusted war-horse. Napoleon rode him during the disastrous battle of Waterloo

In 1815, the armies of Napoleon, Wellington and Blücher met at the battle of Waterloo, marking the end of the Napoleonic Wars. It was a ferocious fight, with thousands of soldiers, artillery and horses crammed into a few square miles.

Napoleon rode into battle on his trusted horse, Marengo (whose skeleton is shown left), named after the French victory at Marengo in 1800. Fourteen hands tall, Marengo was an Arab stallion purchased in Egypt. He was trained to be calm and poised on the battlefield; French riding masters fired guns around him, waved flags and drove dogs through his legs to prepare him for the chaos of war. Over the course of his career Marengo was wounded eight times, yet he was always considered reliable and steady. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, he was captured by the British and rebranded into a London celebrity.

When he died, after outliving his master by a decade, his skeleton was exhibited for the delight of audiences; even Queen Victoria visited the remains. Today, he's housed in London's National Army Museum. Perhaps more macabre, his hooves were made into an inkwell and snuff boxes, and one of the latter has gleamed on the sideboard in the Officers' Mess in St James's Palace for around 190 years.

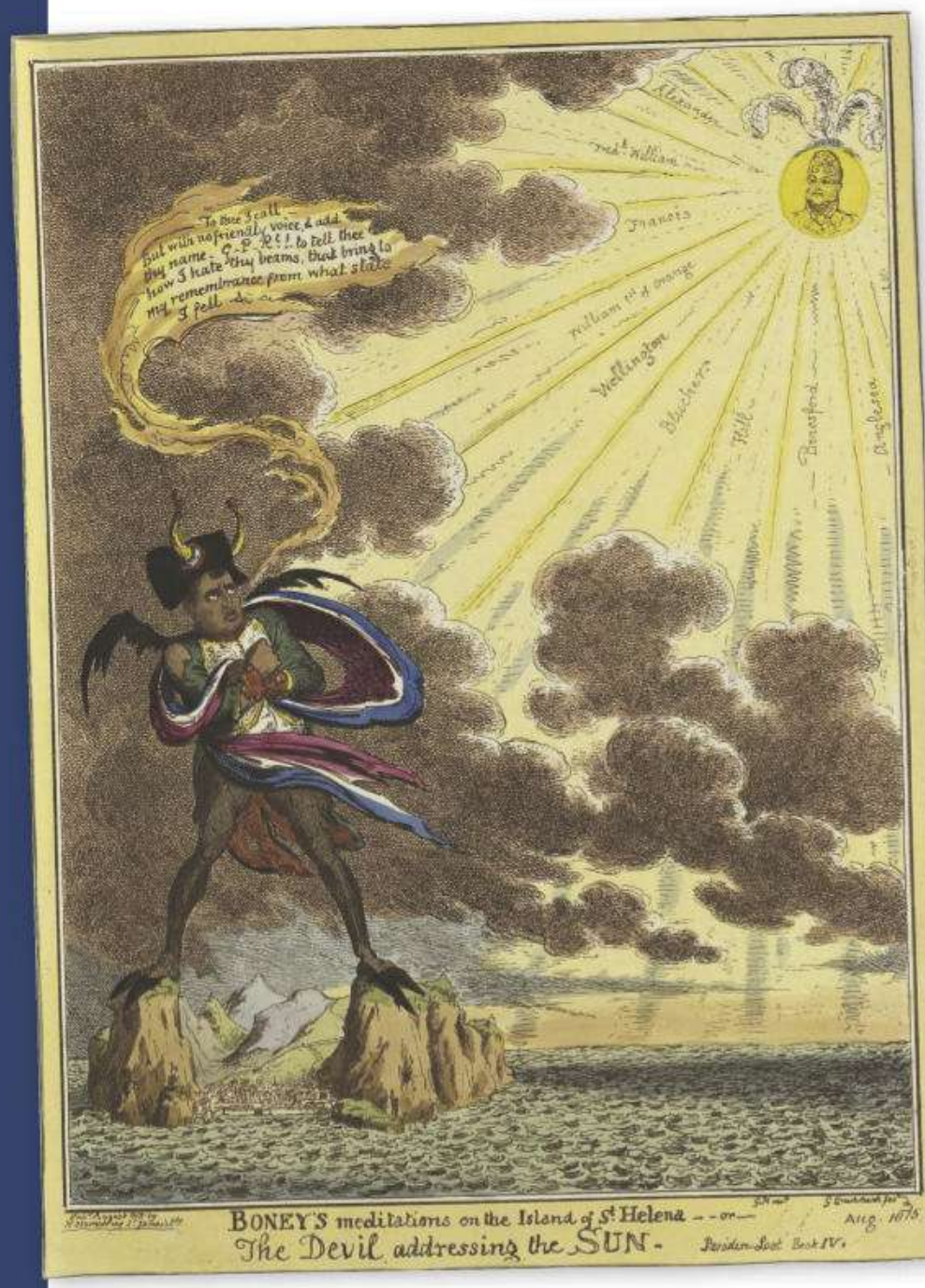
7 Master of nothing

St Helena, Napoleon's final home, was described as a place "further away from anywhere else in all the world". There he lived with an entourage of his loyal generals in a damp house among the lava fields. He was heavily guarded with no access to newspapers.

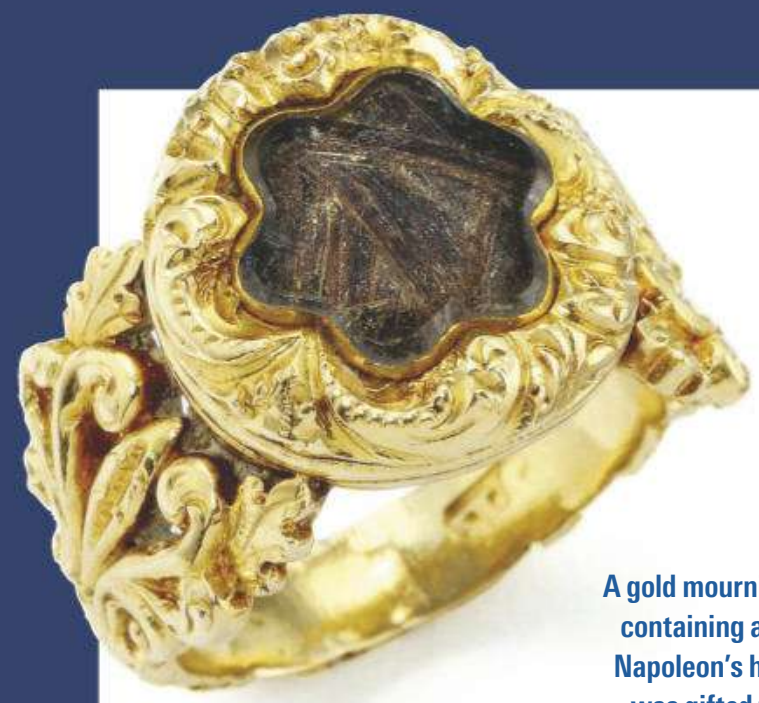
George Cruikshank's 1815 engraving *The Devil Addressing the Sun* (below), which depicts Napoleon as the Miltonic Lucifer, is a strong visual statement of his fall from power. He lauds over the small island with clawed feet and broken wings, staring up at beams of light, each named after his adversaries, and emanating from his chief adversary, the Prince Regent (shown in the sun).

This dark tone captures Napoleon's daily struggle for the remaining few years of his life. He was depressed and reflective, according to those who lived with him. His surgeon, Barry O'Meara, noted his shifts between egoism and despair. Lines such as "from nothing I raised myself to be the most powerful monarch in the world" were followed by him "reclining on the sofa, in a pensive attitude, his head resting upon one of his hands".

Melancholia gave way to physical decline, triggering abdominal pains and fevers. Eventually, the island became Napoleon's tomb.



The 1815 print *The Devil Addressing the Sun* shows the exiled emperor's fall from power



A gold mourning ring containing a lock of Napoleon's hair that was gifted to John Soane in the 1820s

8 Grief and gold

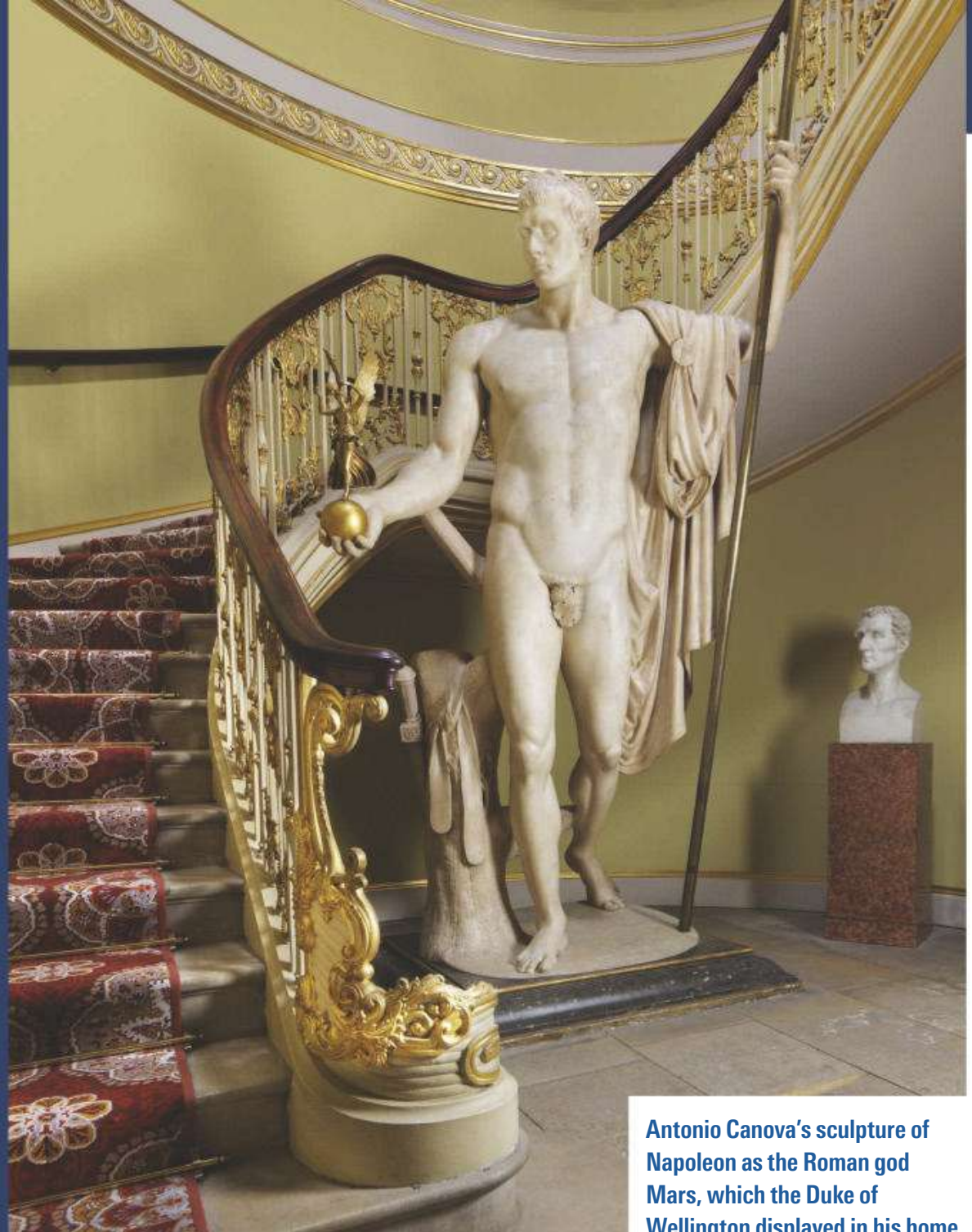
Napoleon died on Saint Helena on 5 May 1821, aged 51, most likely of stomach cancer. The lock of his hair in this ring was gifted to the architect John Soane by Elizabeth "Betsy" Balcombe.

Napoleon had lived with Balcombe, the daughter of an official of the East India Company, and her family on St Helena before his nearby residence, Longwood House, was completed. The exiled ruler formed an unlikely friendship with the teenage Balcombe, whom he nicknamed "Lettle Monkee", playing games and telling her stories of his life and family. She would publish a memoir of their friendship on St Helena in 1844.

Balcombe, "knowing how much Mr Soane esteems the reliques of great men", gifted the lock of hair to Soane in the early 1820s, where he had it set into a gold mourning ring, inscribed in French with the following: "This lock of hair of Napoleon Buonaparte was presented to John Soane Esquire by Miss Elizabeth Balcombe. Pray for Me."

Balcombe's memoir and Soane's mourning ring show the sentimental and romantic attachments that were formed with Napoleon after his death – even among some of his former foes, the British.

TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM/BRIDGEMAN



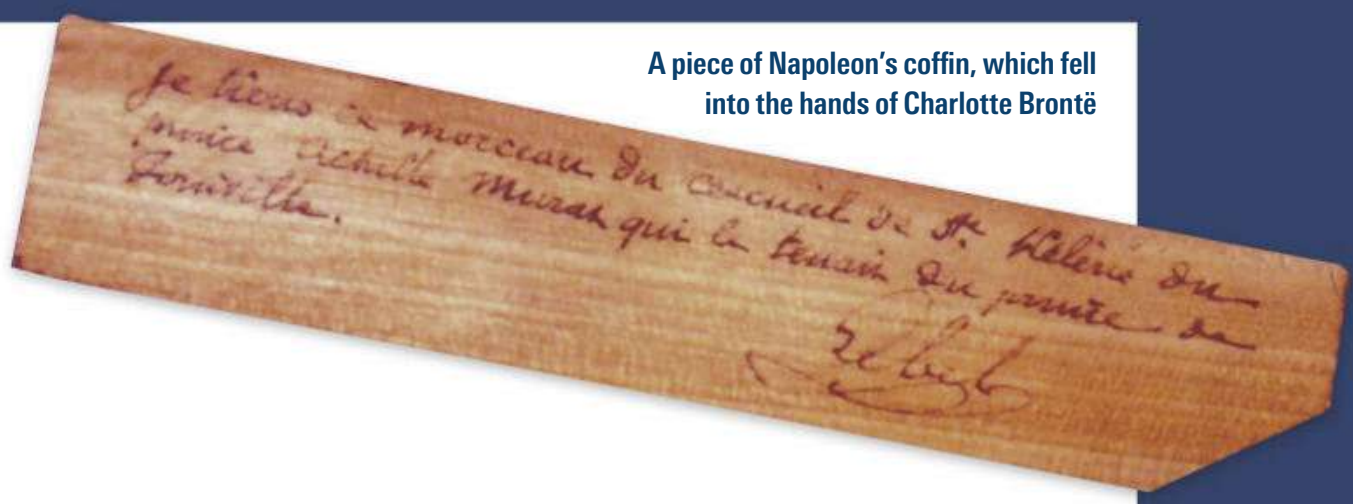
Antonio Canova's sculpture of Napoleon as the Roman god Mars, which the Duke of Wellington displayed in his home

9 The ultimate power play

In April 1811 a new portrait sculpture of Napoleon by the famed neoclassical sculptor Antonio Canova was unveiled in Paris. The monumental 11ft artwork depicted Napoleon as the ancient Roman god of war, Mars. It also presented Bonaparte in the nude, in the heroic style of the Roman emperors he so admired. Napoleon hated it, calling the physique "too athletic", and hid it from public view within the *Musée Napoléon* (the Louvre).

After his defeat at Waterloo, the statue was sold to the British government, who presented it to the Duke of Wellington. The duke installed the sculpture at the base of the stairway of his London home, Apsley House. Wellington continued to collect trophies of his foe: he became the lover of two of Napoleon's mistresses; bought his sister Pauline's mansion in Paris; and amassed an extensive collection of Napoleonic memorabilia including weaponry, books, busts, paintings, and even the vast Sèvres Egyptian dinner service refused by Josephine as a divorce present.

In public, Wellington was the picture of modest Victorian masculinity and self-effacement. But at Apsley, Mars the Peacemaker was used as the ultimate display of personal triumph over the naked emperor, a self-made god forever on undignified display.



A piece of Napoleon's coffin, which fell into the hands of Charlotte Brontë

10 Risen from the grave

In 1844 George Reynolds described Napoleon as that "meteor which blazed so brightly, and which so long terrified all the nations of the universe with its supernal lustre". Despite the emperor's death, his celebrity continued. In Britain, his true nature was hotly debated. Arguments ranged from Napoleon being a misunderstood leader who "neither party even understood" to being responsible for causing "slaughter, fire and human misery", as claimed by Sir Walter Scott in the first full-length biography of the emperor.

In France, Napoleon's continued popularity, paired with ongoing political unrest, led to the joint political move by statesman Adolphe Thiers and King Louis-Philippe to reinter Napoleon in Paris. In 1840, a team went to St Helena to exhume the body, which had hardly decomposed. Some took pieces of the old coffin as souvenirs, such as the one pictured here, which ended up in the possession of the novelist Charlotte Brontë, gifted to her from her Belgian tutor, Constantin Héger.

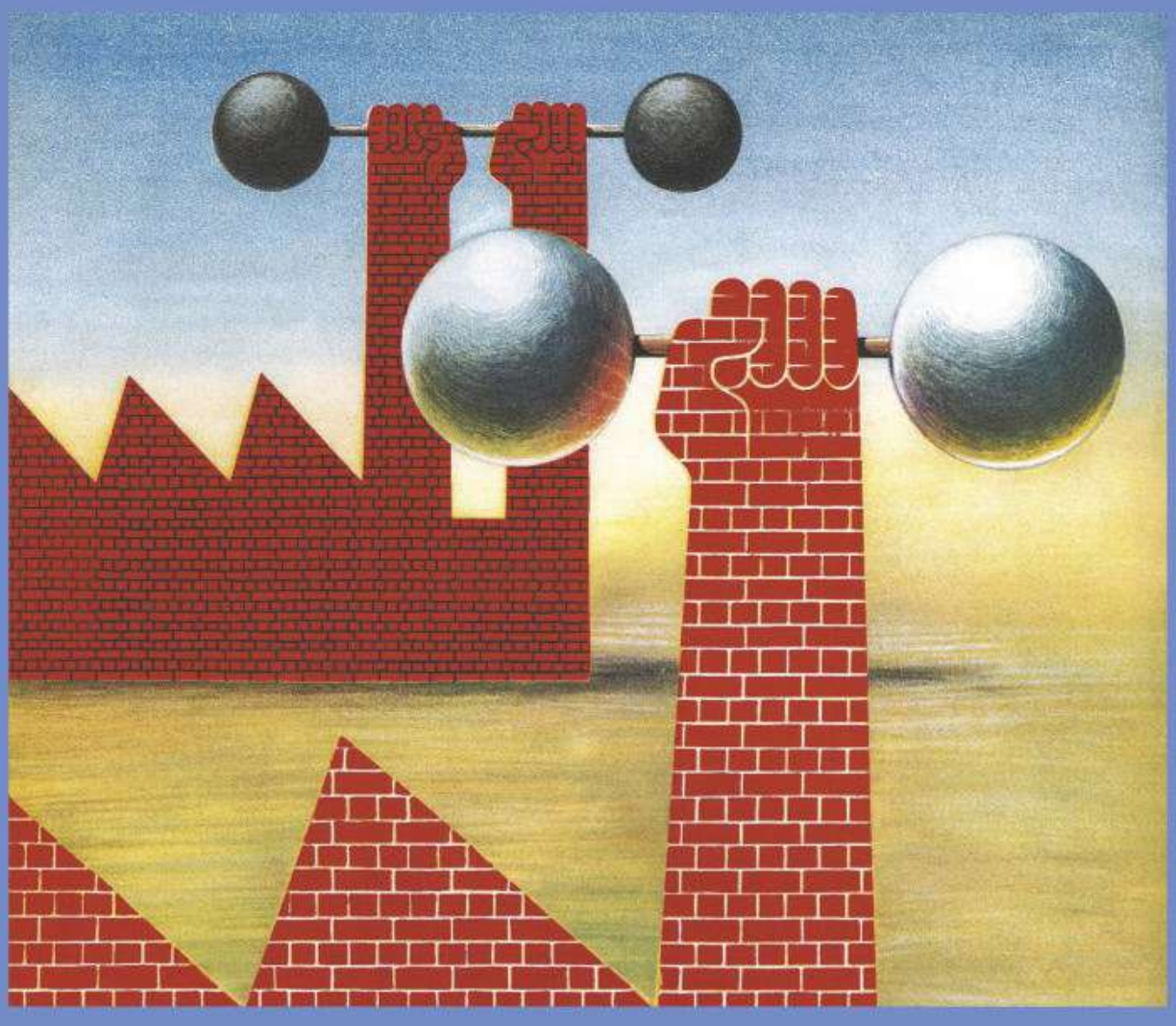
In December Napoleon's remains were brought to Paris for *retour des cendres*, "return of the ashes". A huge crowd gathered on a day described by Victor Hugo as "beautiful as glory / Cold as the tomb". A fitting parade for a sensational life.

Dr Nicole Cochrane is an honorary research fellow at the University of Exeter. **Dr Emma Butcher** is a lecturer in literature and cultural heritage at Edge Hill University

LISTEN Andrew Roberts explores the French leader's life in the five-part series **Napoleon: The Man and the Myths:** *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05zzlb4*

BBC RADIO 4

GETTY/BRONTË SOCIETY & BRONTË PARSONAGE MUSEUM



This advert for the British Aluminium Company was designed by FHK Henrion, the German refugee who would go on to bring a distinctively central European brand of urgency to the Festival of Britain's displays

The Islanders, by refugee sculptor Siegfried Charoux, celebrated the central role that Britain's island status has played in its history

THE BEST OF BRITISH

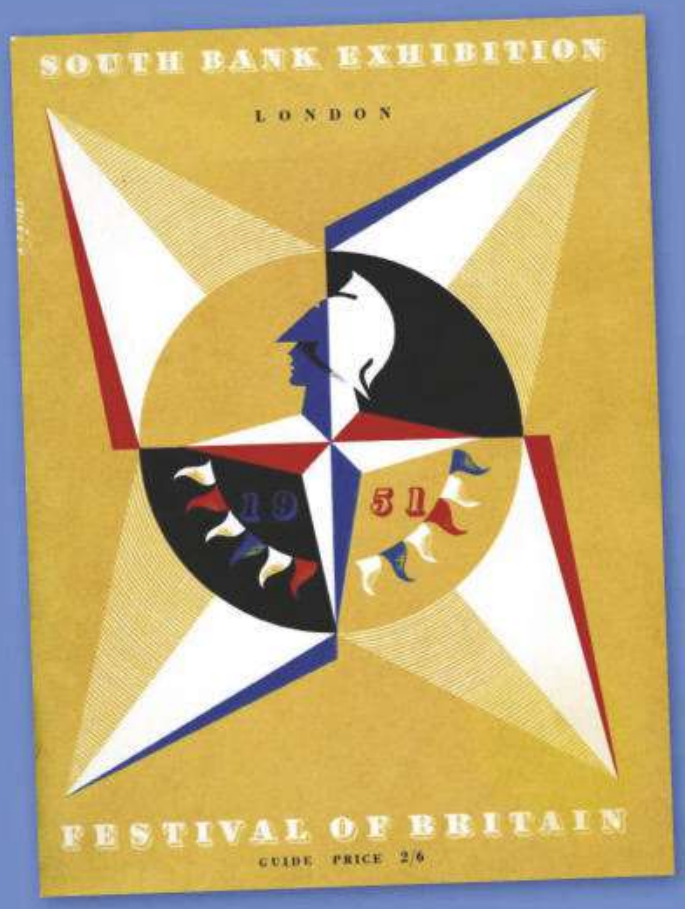
The 365ft-wide Dome of Discovery featured contributions from designers born across Europe

RIGHT: **London was the epicentre of the festival, but events were staged across the UK's four nations**

ALAMY/MARY EVANS

(AND GERMAN, RUSSIAN, HUNGARIAN AND CZECH…)

The official emblem of the festival was a hugely popular – and unashamedly patriotic – creation conceived by Abram Games, the son of Jewish refugees



A pair of startled sunbathers were mounted on a wall of Waterloo station in a sculpture by Hungarian-born Peter Laszlo Peri

GETTY IMAGES/PA IMAGES/ESTATE OF ABRAM GAMES AND TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

The Festival of Britain, which opened 70 years ago, was designed as a paean to an exceptional nation rising triumphantly from the ruins of war. Yet, writes **Harriet Atkinson**, this was a celebration of Britishness with a truly international flavour

HMS *Campania* is piped into the port of Glasgow. The decommissioned aircraft carrier was one of two travelling exhibitions taking the festival around the UK

"Dear land, dear land, our roots are deep in you: May your sons, may your sons grow tall and true!" If any verse captures the national pride that coursed through the Festival of Britain – which opened 70 years ago this month and dominated the nation's cultural landscape throughout the summer of 1951 – then this official poem, penned as an ode to the exhibition, is surely it.

The Festival of Britain was the nation's bid to show off its best side to a watching world – and, more to the point, to its own people. Marking the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 (staged at a time when British imperial power was approaching its zenith), the festival was hailed as a celebration of "the arts of peace" a few short years after the trauma of the Second World War. Prime Minister Clement Attlee's Labour administration also saw it as an opportunity to promote Britain as a model democracy at a time when relations between east and west were increasingly strained.

That this five-month evocation of British exceptionalism struck a chord with the public is beyond doubt. It's estimated that one in three Britons visited one of the exhibitions staged that summer – and that 8 million visitors descended on the festival's spectacular centrepiece: London's South Bank Exhibition, set out around 27 pavilions, across the Thames from Westminster.

Upstream at Battersea, the Festival Pleasure Gardens, a six-acre amusement park reached by boat, gave light relief after the more earnest pleasures of the South Bank. An exhibition of Live Architecture was held in London's East End, enabling visitors to see the redevelopment of a slum area in progress; and a major exhibition in South Kensington showcased scientific advancements "by means of things you can see and believe".

Conquest of power

Yet the Festival of Britain was by no means the sole preserve of the nation's capital. Hundreds of architects, model-makers, sculptors and artists got in on the act across Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England's regions.

In Belfast, the Farm and Factory Exhibition showed "how Ulster earns its living through agriculture and industry". A Heavy Industry Exhibition in Glasgow celebrated Scotland's "conquest of power" through coal and water.

And if you couldn't make the journey to Britain's biggest cities, then the festival could be brought to you, courtesy of two travelling exhibitions: one aboard HMS *Campania*, a decommissioned aircraft carrier, and the other on a fleet of lorries.

THE FESTIVAL PROMOTED BRITAIN AS A MODEL DEMOCRACY AT A TIME WHEN EAST-WEST RELATIONS WERE DETERIORATING

The summer of 1951 witnessed an explosion of creativity – one that encompassed everything from enormous, hi-tech tributes to scientific excellence to the more parochial pleasures of bell-ringing and tree-planting. Yet, for all their apparent diversity, these events had a unity of purpose and were designed to convey a single, overriding message. That message was, to a large extent, the brainchild of the festival's director-general, Gerald Barry, former editor of the left-leaning broadsheet *News Chronicle*. Barry's vision of the festival was for it to show "The British contribution to civilisation past, present and future" and to demonstrate British "diversity within unity". Above all, Barry wanted the festival to focus on telling a "story" about "the land and people of Britain", on reconciling the two in the aftermath of a war that had seen the population displaced and the landscape disfigured.

It was this vision that produced the fiercely nativist evocation of a people wedded to their land that was celebrated in the official poem, and the unashamedly patriotic festival emblem, which portrayed a red-white-and-blue Britannia in profile.

Yet behind the eulogies to British "virtues" lies a truth that may have surprised many of the flag-waving visitors to the festival: that the success of the exhibition was as much a tribute to the creativity and expertise of people some would have considered "outsiders" as the exceptionalism of Britain itself. Many of the exhibitions that dazzled Britons throughout the summer of 1951 were the work of artists, architects and designers who had fled to Britain from the Nazis in the years before the war. And their diverse educations, experiences and bodies of work were to leave an indelible imprint on the festival.

Others hailed from families that had arrived in Britain during earlier waves of migration. One such was Abram Games, who was born on the eve of the First World War in London's Whitechapel to Jewish refugees from the Russian empire. Games was the designer of the famous festival emblem (shown on page 51) portraying Britannia. Mounted on the points of a compass, Games's Britannia adheres to his adage "maximum meaning, minimum means", expressing much through seemingly little. Despite criticism of its "Teutonic" quality, the symbol became extraordinarily popular.

Upstream at the South Bank was a series of pavilions devoted to the "Land of Britain".

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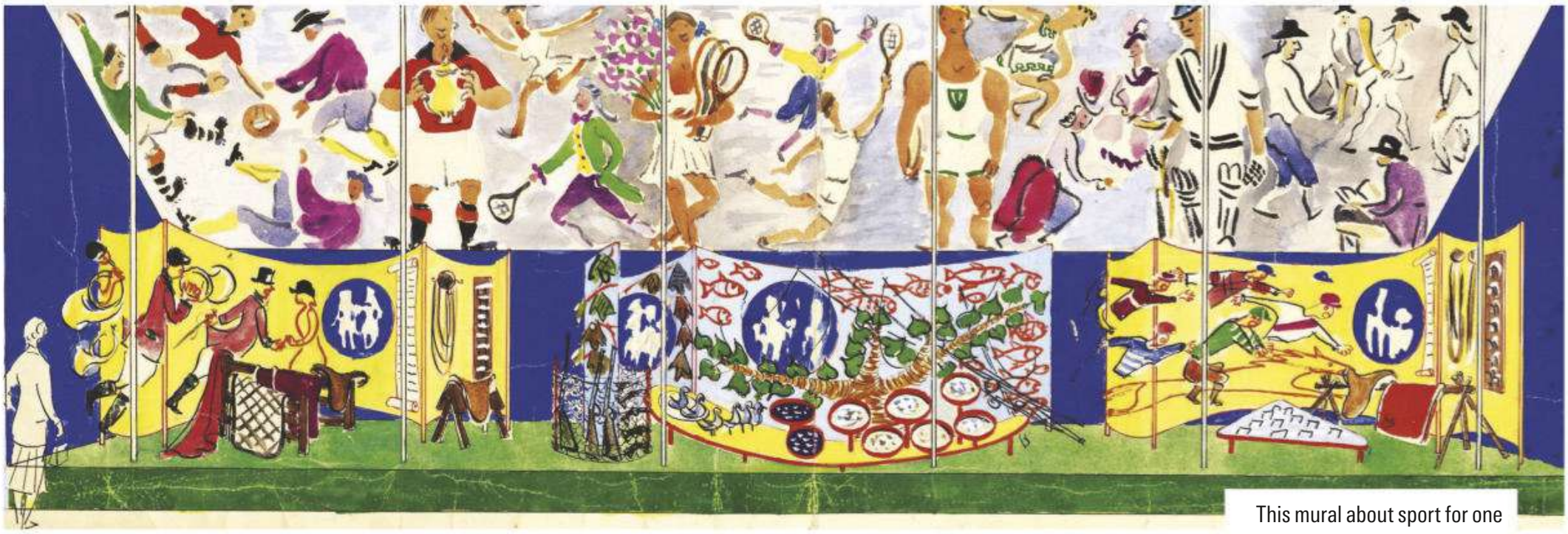
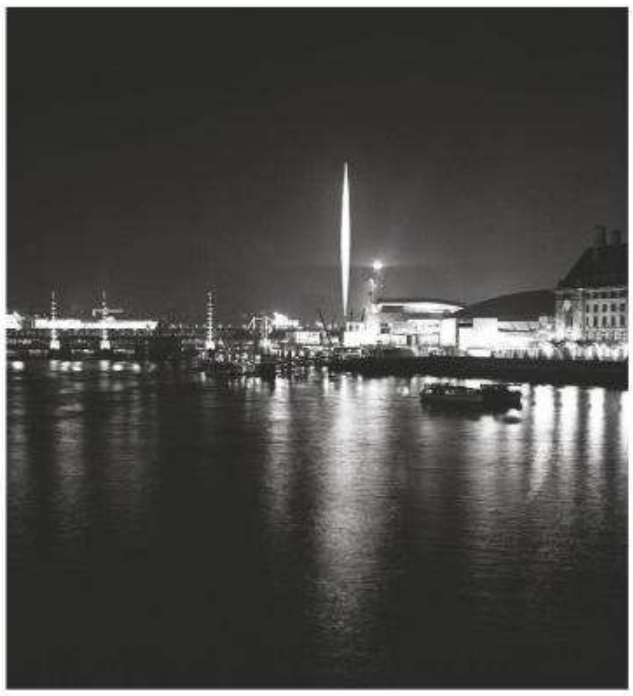
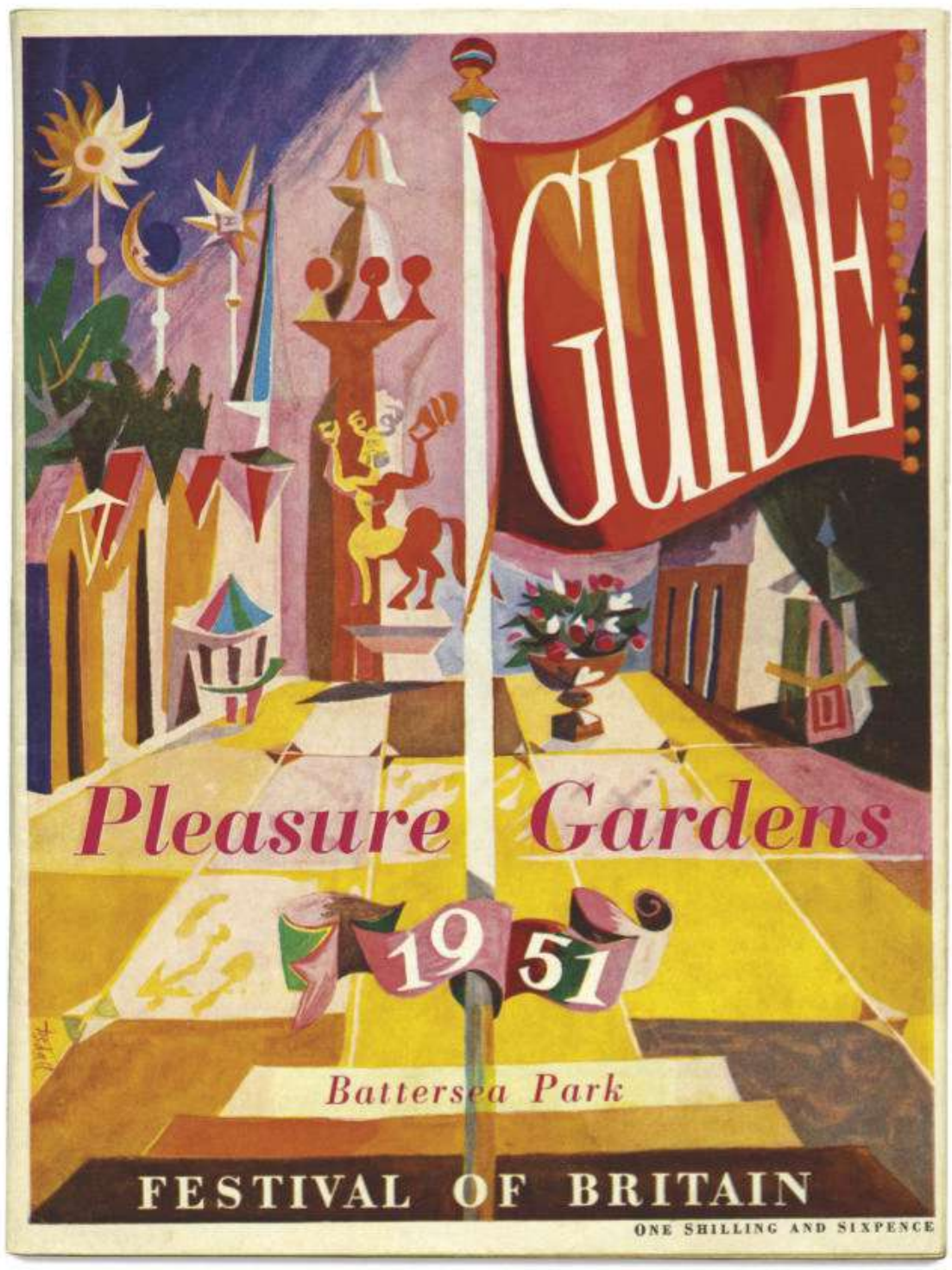


This mural about sport for one of the travelling exhibitions was designed by Dorrit Dekk, a Czech-born artist who moved to London just before the Second World War



LEFT: Skylon towers 300ft above the South Bank. This, the most iconic of all the festival's exhibits, was designed by British and American architects and a Vienna-born structural engineer

ABOVE: Families watch a royal procession make its way to St Paul's, where George VI opened the Festival of Britain, 3 May 1951. It's estimated that one in three Britons attended one of the many events held across the UK that summer



A brochure for the Pleasure Gardens at Battersea Park, where visitors could go on fairground rides, shop for luxury goods and take a trip on a miniature railway

This was overseen by designer Misha Black, who had emigrated to Britain in 1912 at the age of one from the Russian city of Baku (now Azerbaijan). A collector of ephemera from the Great Exhibition of 1851, Black's early enthusiasm for holding events to mark the Great Exhibition's centenary was key to their realisation. Gerald Barry recalled Black visiting his *News Chronicle* office "with the drawings for a magnificent new exhibition building", "a kind of inter-planetary edifice more or less suspended in the sky".

Black's futuristic drawing ingeniously anticipated the choice of the South Bank as a central site by several months and inspired Barry to lobby government to stage the festival.

The Royal Festival Hall, the only South Bank building that remained on the site after 1951, was designed by German-born Peter Moro, working with architects Robert Matthew and Leslie Martin. Meanwhile, Moro's compatriot HJ Reifenberg (who settled in Britain immediately prior to the Second World War) co-designed the impressive Power and Production Pavilion at the South Bank. The pavilion incorporated industrial stands (where visitors could witness the spectacle of industry in action) designed by the Hungarian architect George Fejér.

A giant saucer

Of all the pavilions along the banks of the Thames, few were more imposing than the 365ft-wide Dome of Discovery, a "vast aluminium saucer dome", as its architect, Ralph Tubbs, described it. The displays inside Tubbs' enormous creation featured considerable input from designers born overseas.

The dome was filled with displays detailing how scientific discovery had allowed British people to circumnavigate the world made by Misha Black and his fledgling practice Design Research Unit. Hungarian-born architect Stefan Buzás joined this team to make an Earth Sciences display.

Another popular South Bank structure was the towering Skylon, which climbed 300ft into the London sky and was designed by architects Hidalgo Moya and Philip Powell working with Vienna-born structural engineer Felix Samuely.

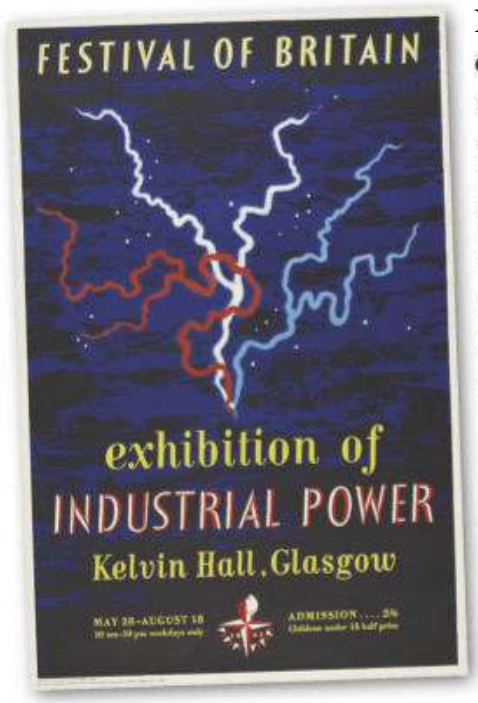
THESE REFUGEES' DIVERSE EXPERIENCES AND BODIES OF WORK LEFT AN INDELIBLE IMPRINT ON THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

Equally eye-catching was *The Islanders*, a massive relief created by the refugee sculptor Siegfried Charoux. Charoux had arrived in Britain from Austria in 1935, becoming a citizen in 1946. His depiction of a man, woman and child gazing out over the Thames in front of architect Basil Spence's Sea and Ships pavilion represented the family unit as robust and immutable, and underlined the importance of Britain's island status to its national identity.

Hungarian Peter Laszlo Peri's sculpture *Sunbathing* was mounted vertically on the wall of the South Bank's Waterloo station gate entrance. The playful piece showed a sunbathing couple turning suddenly, as if startled by visitors peering over the wall at them.

Peri had fled to Britain in 1933 and, alongside a number of festival artists (including Misha Black), was a member of the anti-fascist Artists' International Association (AIA). Another AIA member, the German-born exhibition and poster designer FHK Henrion, was tasked with designing the South Bank's Country and Natural Scene displays. Henrion was interned by the British authorities as an Enemy Alien early in the Second World War before joining Black to make propaganda at the Ministry of Information. His striking displays for the festival – brimming with a visual urgency more characteristic of central European graphic design – caught the attention of poet Dylan Thomas who described them as "the natural history of owled and cuckooed, ottered, unlikely London".

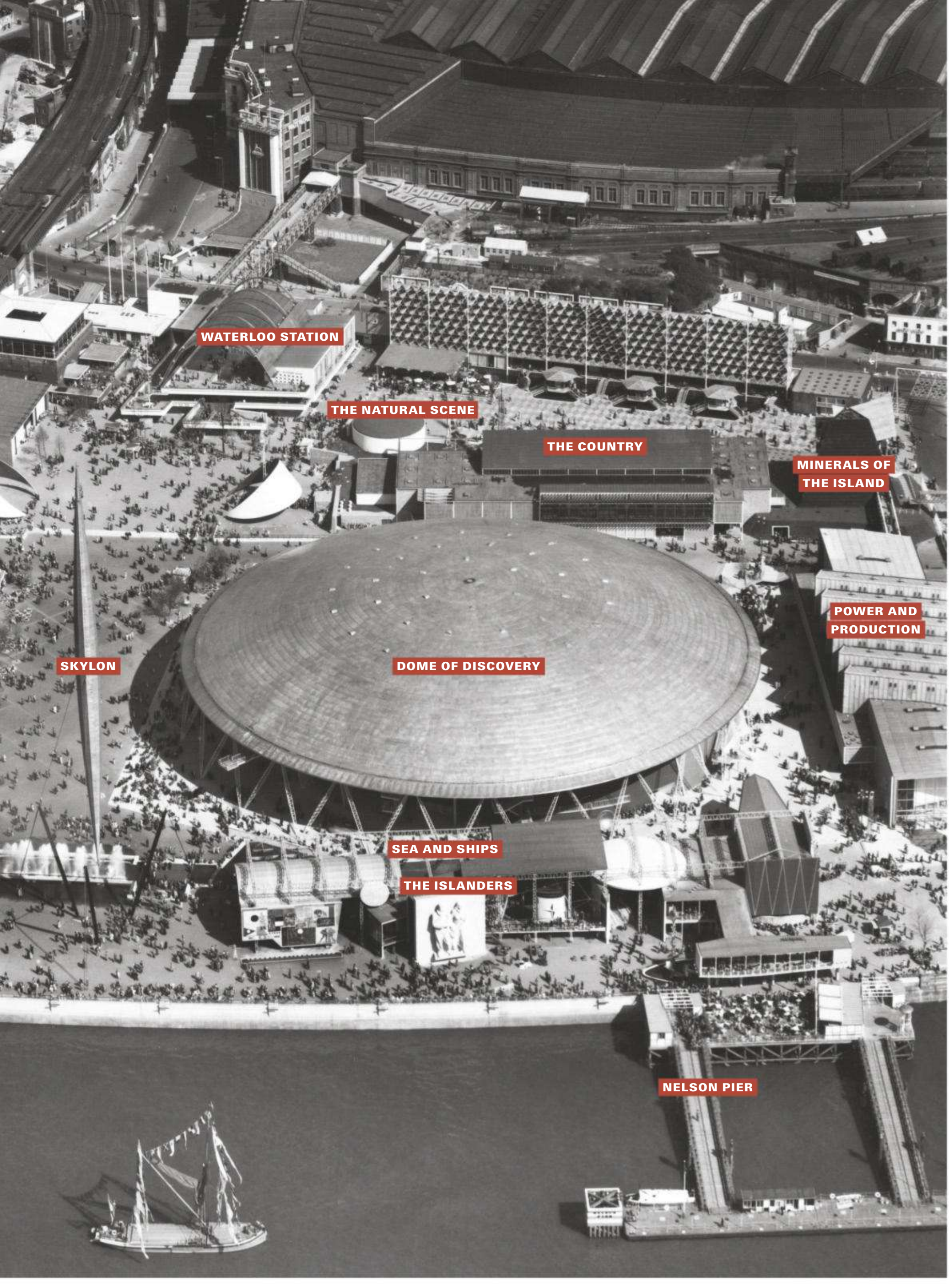
Murals – both painted and mosaic – featured heavily across the Festival of Britain's exhibitions. This was an art form suited to



The festival celebrated Britain's industrial past and its position at the vanguard of the science revolution, as this poster shows

An aerial view of some of the highlights of the South Bank Exhibition site. Eight million people visited this, the centrepiece of the Festival of Britain, over the summer of 1951

GETTY IMAGES/ REGINALD MOUNT–VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM LONDON


WATERLOO STATION
THE NATURAL SCENE
THE COUNTRY
MINERALS OF THE ISLAND
POWER AND PRODUCTION
SKYLON
DOME OF DISCOVERY
SEA AND SHIPS
THE ISLANDERS
NELSON PIER

CREATIVE GENIUSES

Four foreign-born designers who sprinkled a little magic on the Festival of Britain

Misha Black
1910–77

Misha Black was born Moisei Tcherny in Baku, Russia (now Azerbaijan) and brought to Britain aged one. He started work at 17 and, over 50 years in design practice, worked for a vast range of clients designing exhibitions, radios, the visual identity of London Underground's Victoria Line, Westminster City Council street signs and the corporate identity of British Rail.

At the Festival of Britain, Black was part of the design team planning all the nationwide events and oversaw major parts of the South Bank Exhibition. He later became the Royal College of Art's first professor of Industrial Design Engineering.

Jacqueline Groag
1903–86

Groag's contribution to the Festival of Britain was nothing if not eye-catching: a curtain of simulated, threaded bones for the Dome of Discovery's Living World exhibition.

Born Hilde Blumberger in Prague, Groag studied textile design at Vienna's Kunstgewerbeschule (Arts and Crafts School) and worked for leading Paris fashion houses including Chanel, Lanvin and Worth.

After working in Germany, Austria and Prague with her architect husband Jacques, she came to Britain in 1939. Groag established a highly successful practice, with clients including London Transport, Dunlop, British Overseas Airways Corporation and Formica Ltd.

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Willy de Majo acted as co-coordinating designer for the Ulster Farm and Factory Exhibition in Belfast

FHK Henrion
1914–90

Nuremberg-born FHK Henrion moved to Paris in 1933 where he studied graphic arts, travelling to Tel Aviv for work before arriving in London in 1936. Henrion (original name Henrich Frederick Fritz Kohn) was interned on the Isle of Man briefly during 1940, then released to work on propaganda for the UK Ministry of Information and the US Office of War Information.

After the war, Henrion developed a busy practice designing corporate identities and exhibitions. He worked on the Festival of Britain's Country and Natural Scene displays at the South Bank Exhibition and remained in London until his death in 1990.

Willy de Majo
1917–93

Born William Maks de May in Vienna to Yugoslav parents, Willy de Majo established his own design business in Belgrade in 1935. Moving to Britain in 1939, he joined the Royal Air Force in 1941 and after the war re-established a design practice in London, working in graphic, industrial and exhibition design, corporate identity, packaging and product development.

De Mayo acted as co-coordinating designer for the Festival of Britain's major Farm and Factory exhibition at Castlereagh in Belfast.

RONALD A CHAPMAN- WILLY DE MAJO ARCHIVE, UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON DESIGN ARCHIVES

The Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra gives its first public performance in London at the South Bank Exhibition, prompting "a wave of admiration for Caribbean music"

GETTY IMAGES

socially engaged subjects, as evidenced in the work of the German-born artist Jupp Dernbach-Mayen, whose mosaic mural for the Dome of Discovery showed a coal miner drilling deep beneath an industrial landscape. Miners – heroic figures of leftist art – were a recurring motif in the festival and also the subject of Polish-born Josef Herman's monumental oil painting in tribute to the miners of his newfound home in Wales for the South Bank's Minerals of the Island section.

This is just a snapshot of the enormous contribution that relatively recent arrivals to Britain –many of them refugees – made to the festival. And it begs a question: why? The principal reason was practical. The festival was a source of a vast and varied number of contracts at a time when, whatever their nationality or background, opportunities for artists and architects to make a living were thin on the ground. And the continuing rationing of materials meant that there were limited opportunities to design buildings elsewhere.

But there was more to this than money. The Festival of Britain provided an opportunity for those who had not come through Britain's established art institutions to connect with other designers. It resulted in lasting design consultancies and architectural practices, commissions and lifelong friendships.

Difference and dissent

All this, of course, was at odds with the image of the nation offered to visitors to the festival: that of one "Britain", knitted together by a single, authorial voice, playing down difference and dissent.

This may explain why some of those who realised Gerald Barry's vision were made to feel like outsiders. Charles Plouviez, who worked in the festival office, told me in an interview that he recalled seeing a letter in which his French-sounding surname, and that of a co-worker, had been bracketed with the comment: "I thought this was supposed to be a Festival of Britain".

The presence of so many refugees in the roster of designers also sat uneasily with the official line that the festival was the celebration of a "Christian nation". "It is Christianity which has been the religion of this country and formative of its tradition and not Judaism," intoned Geoffrey Fisher, the archbishop of Canterbury, "and, if the festival is to be typical of England, the religious contribution must be Christian."

But, for all Fisher's words, many of the festival's designers were of Jewish heritage – among them the architect Leonard Manasseh, winner of the competition to design the South Bank's '51 Bar. The omission of Judaism from the festival's definition of Britishness was addressed in a small way by an Anglo-Jewish Exhibition 1851–1951, which traced a century of Jewish experience in Britain. However, while the exhibition featured works by refugee artists such as Jankel Adler, Hermann Fechenbach and Hans Feibusch, it prioritised the contribution of an established Jewish elite, such as members of the Rothschild family, with little acknowledgement of those whose designs were taking centre stage in the main festival.

KITCHENER'S POPULAR HIT DECLARED THAT "THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN IS HERE, PEOPLE ARE WELCOME FROM EVERYWHERE"

The Festival of Britain's account of cultural diversity was in fact confined to prehistory and archaeology. The festival guide declared: "We are a much-mixed race, and the clue to our way of life and our achievement lies in this blended ancestry" – one that was traced through "Stone Age colonists", "Bronze Age warriors" and "sea-faring Vikings"… "It is the very blood that they brought here that runs in us."

Recent waves of immigration, including those that had arrived on the *Windrush*, were absent from the official story. But the festival *did* provide important contacts with Caribbean culture. The visit of the 11-person Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) to the South Bank Exhibition prompted a wave of admiration for Caribbean music, although tellingly the funds to bring these musicians to London were raised at home not in Britain. Calypsonians Lord Beginner and Lord Kitchener, both of whom sailed to Britain aboard the *Windrush*, recorded songs for the festival. Kitchener's popular hit declared that "The Festival of Britain is here, People are welcome from everywhere!"

For all the patriotic pride that infused the Festival of Britain, Kitchener's sentiment was certainly borne out by the diverse backgrounds of the architects, designers and artists who brought this most remarkable of national exhibitions to life.

Harriet Atkinson is a senior lecturer in the School of Humanities at the University of Brighton. Her book *Modernist Exhibitions in Britain for Propaganda and Resistance, 1933 to 1953* is due to be published by Manchester University Press in 2022

LISTEN To listen to **Witness History's exploration of the Festival of Britain**, originally broadcast on the BBC World Service, go to *bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00g9stg*

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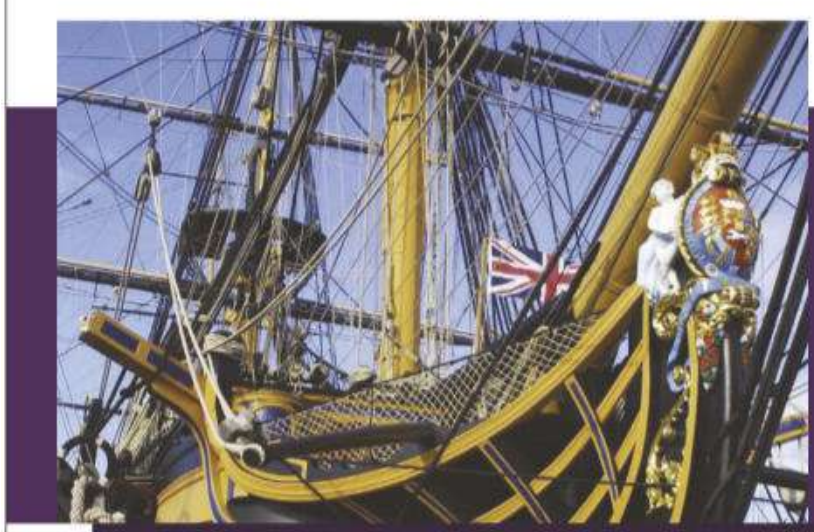

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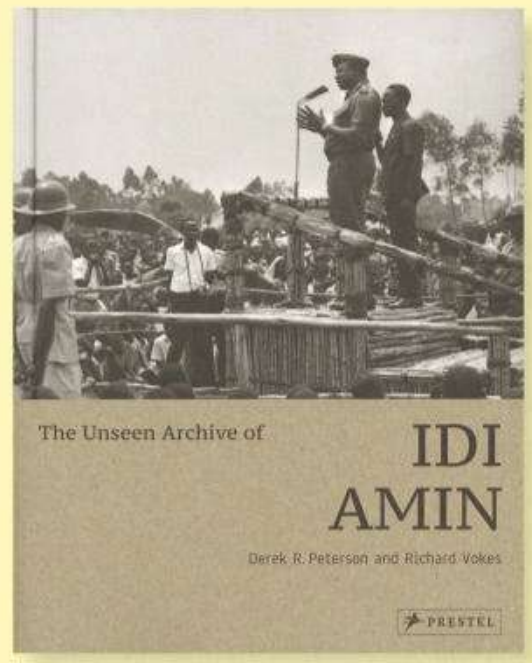

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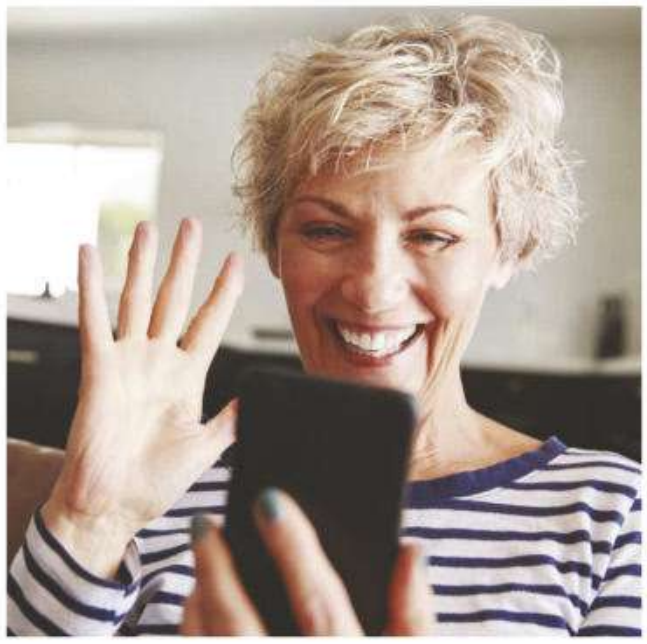

Suitable for iPhones, Android phones like Samsungs and so on and Doros. (Not sure what phone you have? Best send off for the free info pack)

Modern mobile phones – smartphones as they're called – can do so much more than just make phone calls.

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Do the manufacturers do it on purpose?

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In fact only yesterday I was talking to someone whose Mum had got a new all-singing-all-dancing phone – but she couldn't work out how to answer a phone call on it! She's not daft – it's just that it's different from what she'd used before and the phone didn't come with a manual telling her what to do.

Whether you have similar problems or you're trying to do something slightly more advanced, the thing is, it can be easy to use them... once you know how. But until you've been shown, it can be like talking a different language.

That's why we've published these two books by Tim Wakeling: *iPhones one Step at a Time* and *Android Smartphones One Step at a Time.*

Plain English... and that's not all

They explain how to use the phone, in plain simple language with pictures of the screen showing you exactly where to tap or slide your fingers. No jargon!

What's covered?

I can't list it all here. But amongst other things, you'll discover:

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John of Gaunt shown in a c16th-century portrait. Gaunt's tabard bears the royal arms of Castile and León, the Spanish kingdom that grew into an obsession for the English prince

BRIDGEMAN

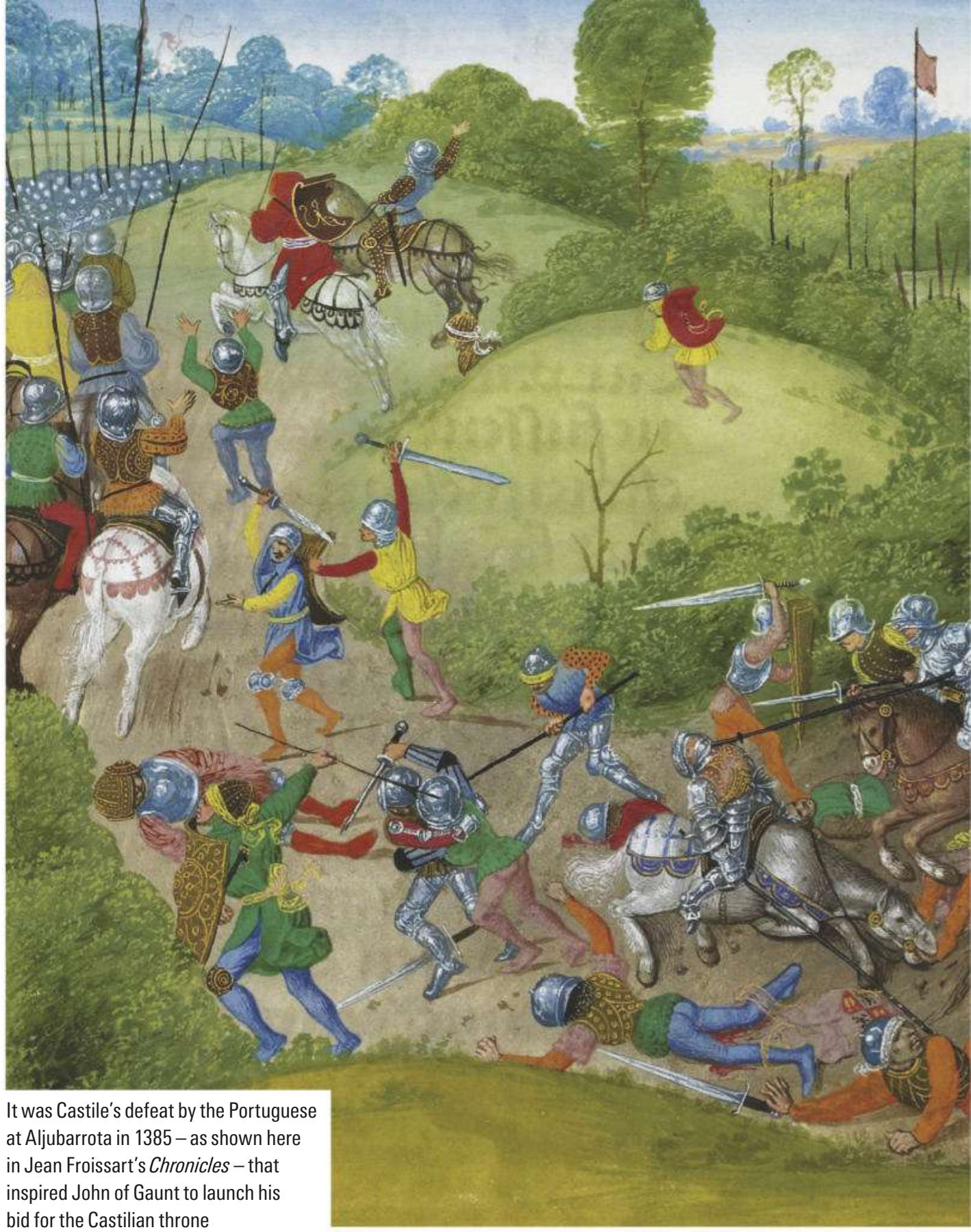
The man who would be king

How could a younger son of Edward III make his mark? An international conquest promised to do the trick – if he could pull it off. **Helen Carr** follows John of Gaunt's extraordinary mission to capture the throne of Castile in the 1380s

On 25 July 1386, three young men disembarked from a Portuguese galley at the port of Corunna. Landing on the north-west Spanish coast were Ralph Bulmere, just old enough to receive his inheritance at home; Baldwin Saint George from Cambridgeshire; and Thomas Chaucer, son of writer and diplomat Geoffrey Chaucer. They had come to win their spurs in one of the most ambitious military campaigns of the late 14th century: the invasion of Castile by John of Gaunt.

At that time, Castile was the largest of four Christian kingdoms in the Iberian peninsula. Sandwiched between Portugal to the west and Aragon and Navarre to the east, and with the Muslim emirate of Granada to the south, Castile also encompassed León and coastal Galicia, site of Corunna. And in the 14th century it was embroiled in an interminable tussle for succession between England and France: the Hundred Years' War.

Castile's involvement had peaked two decades earlier with the pitched battle of Najéra in Navarre on 3 April 1367, in which the army of the Black Prince, heir to English king Edward III, charged across a dusty plain at Castilian and French forces – and emerged victorious. Leading the vanguard was John of Gaunt, the Black Prince's younger brother. Najéra was his formative experience of battle, and sparked a 20-year-long obsession with Spanish conquest.



It was Castile's defeat by the Portuguese at Aljubarrota in 1385 – as shown here in Jean Froissart's *Chronicles* – that inspired John of Gaunt to launch his bid for the Castilian throne

Cruel twist of fate

John was not only a prince but also the most powerful magnate in England, with wealth and influence to rival the crown. His possessions included England's richest duchy, Lancaster, and he also inherited lands in northern France as well as northern and southern England. An astute politician, John was deeply loyal to his family and his father Edward III's martial interests, and spent his early career as a diplomat. He saw Castile as the gateway to both personal power and Plantagenet expansion into Europe.

An opportunity soon fell into his lap. In 1369, Enrique Trastámara, a French ally and claimant to the crown of Castile, murdered his half brother King Pedro I "The Cruel", an ally of England. Pedro's daughters, Constance and Isabella, fled to the Black Prince for protection and in 1371 John of Gaunt, recently widowed, married Constance near Bordeaux. The following year he was formally entitled "King of Castile and León" by right of his wife, and aspired to drive an army into Spain, oust Enrique and rule Castile.

Initially, John's ambitions were thwarted by the demands of domestic politics. The Black Prince's health deteriorated following a long sickness contracted during that fateful Spanish campaign, and Edward III suffered a series of strokes. When both died, in 1376 and 1377 respectively, John became the effective regent of England in the minority reign of his nephew (the Black Prince's son King Richard II). Despite these distractions, though, he continued to style himself king of Castile, displaced in England.

John saw his marriage to Constance of Castile (below) as a gateway to power in Iberia

Then, after years of impasse, in 1385 the army of Portuguese King João I defeated Castile and allies at the battle of Aljubarrota, leaving the Spanish kingdom weakened. With the blessing of Richard II and parliament, John sailed from Plymouth to conquer Castile and rule it as a Plantagenet domain. Before John's departure, Richard gave his uncle the gift of "a golden crown… and ordered all to call the duke King of Spain, and to accord him royal honours on all occasions".

The English arrival at Corunna was meticulously timed. John's party landed on

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Our map of 14th-century Iberia shows some of the key locations in John of Gaunt's bid to seize the kingdom of Castile, from the disembarkation at Corunna in the summer of 1386 to the peace deal signed at Trancoso

MAP BY PAUL HEWITT–BATTLEFILED DESIGN

the feast day of James the Apostle (Santiago), patron saint of Spain – emblematic of his desire for his kingship to be seen as God-given. Also disembarking were goldsmiths, painters, embroiderers, cooks, minstrels and chaplains, as well as John's wife and three daughters, Philippa, Elizabeth and Catherine, and their ladies. The contingent, which included young Ralph, Baldwin and Thomas, also counted among its number John's trusted Castilian chancellor, Juan Gutiérrez, and Richard Burley, marshal of his army, who had fought alongside him at Najéra.

Another campaigner was Sir Thomas Percy, keeper of Roxburgh Castle, who invested heavily in John's claim and brought with him more than 200 men. John had earlier requested that Percy pay his own expenses, and those of his men, in return for profits from the war – such as loot or prisoners to be ransomed – which might amount to a significant sum.

John's first target was the holy city of Santiago de Compostela, sacred heart of Spain. As he had hoped, there was no conflict: terms were quickly agreed, and he was ceremonially handed the keys to the city before crowds of spectators. At the town of Orense, in a manner befitting a king, John established a chancery and had his own coins minted using bullion transported from Plymouth. He clearly intended a perpetual English occupation of Castile – but this would not go unchallenged.

In a bid to stymie his advance, John's enemies burned crops and stripped towns of supplies

The news soon reached Juan Trastámara, Enrique's son and successor, at his castle in Zamora, south-east of Galicia. Juan, who had anticipated an attack via Portugal, launched a diatribe against the English, branding them unholy "schismatics". Left with only a skeletal fighting force after defeat at Aljubarrota, Juan sought French aid. Oliver de Clisson, the constable of France, agreed to help; he was stationed in Castile with a small contingent of soldiers, and French king Charles VI promised another 2,000 men at arms.

Raising a red flag

Juan was advised to adopt the French tactics of evasion and scorched earth. Crops were burned and, as black smoke billowed across the plains, towns and villages were stripped of supplies. An abundance of strongholds littered the plains of Castile, reflected in the kingdom's arms – golden castles upon a red flag – and many residents of towns and villages were evacuated to fortified garrisons. Bridges were destroyed, livestock was

removed from pasture, and personal letters were intercepted to detect evidence of any traitors conspiring with the English.

Juan had made Castile as hostile to the enemy as possible in the hope that John's army would perish in the late summer heat, when the ground was so arid and barren the men could "hardly breathe… their mouths were full of sand". And indeed the chronicler Jean Froissart wrote that "the days grew hotter and hotter, until no one dared to go out riding after nine o'clock unless he wanted to be scorched by the sun". The hopeful mood of John's army as it disembarked at Corunna now evaporated in the blazing sun that blasted the barren Castilian landscape. The situation worsened in August when a sickness swept through the English ranks, claiming many lives; in September it took Lord Walter Fitzwalter, one of John's most valued men.

Disease and scorching temperatures turned the Anglo-Portuguese assault on Villalpando (above) into a fiasco. Some 800 English squires, archers, knights and barons lost their lives in the attack on the Franco-Castilian forces

Shady dealings

Trapped in Galicia with a rapidly sickening army, John was left with two options: sue for peace or make a formal alliance with the Portuguese. So in November 1386 he met João I in the village of Ponte de Mouro, on the Castilian-Portuguese border, to discuss the terms of a military pact. In the shade of a canopy, the two men formalised plans for a major Anglo-Portuguese invasion of Castile. João promised to lead 5,000 men himself and, in return, John would extend Portuguese territory by granting land along the border. The pact would be sealed with a marriage between João and Philippa of Lancaster, John's eldest daughter, who would become queen of Portugal.

The campaign was revived. It soon became apparent, though, that John's influence did not extend beyond his own men. Soon after the Portuguese army moved out of Porto at the end of February 1387, there was an awkward exchange in which John learned that the Portuguese had demoted him. Rather than leading the vanguard, as he had at the battle of Najéra, that role was claimed by Nun'Alvarez, constable of Portugal. João, uncomfortably torn between his commander and his new father-in law, did little to improve the situation for John. This slight showed that control lay with João and his Portuguese army, not with the English. The alliance that had seemed so promising had in fact compromised John's influence.

The agreed objective was the city of León, a tortuous journey that took the army through Portugal and Castile. The route passed a series of garrisons, opportune targets for siege, conquest and plunder. Among the first was Benavente, south of León. Without siege engines, an attack on the largest garrison in Castile was ambitious, and the attackers first made camp away from the town, out of range of the bowmen on the high walls. However, Benavente was also occupied by French soldiers, and English and French began to fraternise here for the first – but not the last – time during the invasion.

Many who served John in Spain were seasoned soldiers, having experienced campaigns in France. Some of the French in Benavente recognised English men, calling out to them and, in a display of traditional chivalry, arranging jousts and tilts. The Portuguese looked on in disbelief, and a wave of scepticism – about the loyalty of the English soldiers, and even about John's intentions in Castile – swept through their ranks. They saw the Englishmen's actions as an insult to their own loyalty. The animosity already fermenting among their leaders

ALAMY

TIMELINE **John of Gaunt's action-packed life**

March 1340
John of Gaunt is born to **Philippa of Hainault and King Edward III** of England at the Abbey of Saint Bavon in Ghent.

1361
John takes control of the **duchy of Lancaste**r – and, in doing so, becomes the wealthiest nobleman in England.

1367
Alongside his brother the Black Prince, John leads a campaign into Castile, in order to restore the throne to an English ally, Pedro I (AKA Pedro the Cruel). This results in the decisive Anglo-Gascon victory at the **battle of Najéra**.

1368
Blanche, John's first wife, dies at Tutbury Castle, possibly from complications following childbirth.

1370
John becomes lieutenant of Aquitaine, as ill health **forces the Black Prince back to England.**

John of Gaunt was a younger son of Edward III (left), who ruled England for 50 years

A depiction of John's marriage to his first wife, Blanche

John of Gaunt (far left, in blue, under the arms of England and France) feasts with João I of Portugal. Despite this depiction of amity, the Portuguese were deeply suspicious about English intentions on the Iberian peninsula

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

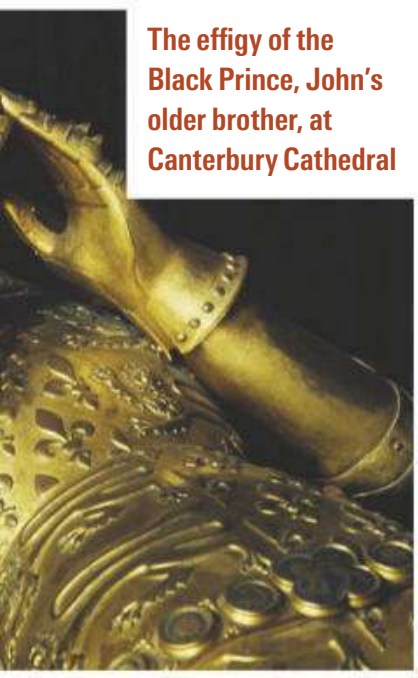
thus infiltrated the rest of the men.

Abandoning hope of taking Benavente, the joint army advanced deeper into Castile to the small town of Valderas where, despite the inhabitants' attempts to thwart pillaging, the ample pickings attracted the attention of hungry soldiers, deepening the rift. As the army entered the town, Portuguese and English began to fight over the potential booty, until it was decreed that the English could plunder for the first half of the day, then the Portuguese for the second. After a few hours, though, agitated Portuguese soldiers stormed the town, leading to further skirmishes until João galloped forward and ordered his soldiers to stand down.

There was more friction between the English and Portuguese than war with the enemy

By this point, the relationship had completely disintegrated; there was more friction between the English and the Portuguese than there was action against the Castilian enemy. In an attempt to rescue the campaign, they took aim at Villalpando, a garrison south of León controlled by the constable of France, Olivier de Clisson, with the intention of an assault leading to a pitched battle. That hope was again thwarted by the climate.

As spring turned to summer, the sun scorched the earth at midday and the horses,



The effigy of the Black Prince, John's older brother, at Canterbury Cathedral

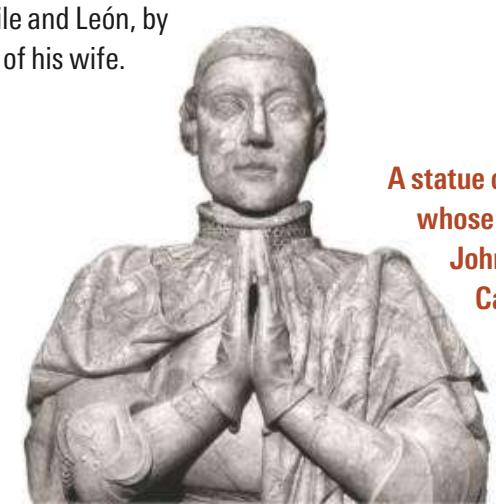
1371
John marries Constance, the daughter and heir of the now **deceased Pedro I**. The following year, he is formally entitled king of Castile and León, by right of his wife.

1377
Following the death of his brother and father, **John becomes effective regent of England** during the minority reign of his nephew Richard II.

1387
His ambitious attempt to **conquer the kingdom of Castile** having ended in failure, John travels to Aquitaine and, the following year, returns from there to England.

1396
Two years after the death of Constance, **John marries Katherine Swynford**. John's children by Katherine are now legitimised with the title Beaufort.

3 February 1399
John dies at Leicester, age 58. That October, after overthrowing Richard II, John's eldest son **is crowned Henry IV,** the first Lancastrian king of England.



A statue of Pedro I, whose murder led to John of Gaunt's Castile campaign

Richard II surrenders the English crown to John's son Henry Bolingbroke

Trancoso Castle in northern Portugal. It's thought that it was here, in 1387, that John of Gaunt negotiated the truce that brought his failed bid for the Castilian throne to an end

As the English and French jousted, the Portuguese were forced to scavenge birds' nests on the side of the road

weak and parched, mauled the hard, dry ground for want of grass. Thirsty soldiers sucked at grapes and drank heavy Portuguese wine, becoming drunk and dehydrated, many stripping off their clothes in an attempt to cool off. Temperatures plummeted overnight. Then, writes Froissart, "came the morning chill which struck through their whole bodies, giving them sickness and fever and afflicting them with flux [dysentery]". These fluctuations in temperature, combined with malnourishment and dehydration – from the wine and agonising bouts of dysentery – led to more deaths in the camp and the further spread of disease.

This wave of deaths stole many of John's best men and, with them, his morale. By the end of May he had lost Lord Scales, Lord Poynings, his son-in-law Thomas Morieux, his chamberlain John Marmion and, most painfully, his dearest friend and loyal marshal of his army, Simon Burley.

John's response was to retreat into his own company. "The Duke of Lancaster was at his wits' end and often weighed down by anxiety," wrote Froissart. "He saw his men – the best of them – exhausted and ill and taking to their beds, while he himself felt weary that he lay in his bed without moving… yet from time to time he would get up and do his best to seem cheerful, so not to discourage his men."

Disease had shadowed the English campaign through Spain, and the loss of men was immense: more than 800 squires, archers, knights and barons perished at Villalpando alone, and survivors lamented that "our lord of Lancaster has brought us to Spain to die". One knight, Thomas Quinebery, escaped Spain and met Jean Froissart on his way home to England, enfeebled but grateful for his life. He informed the chronicler that John had lost at least half of his army.

And what of Ralph Bulmere, Thomas Chaucer and Baldwin Saint George, the eager young squires who had disembarked at Corunna in July 1386? We know that the latter two made it back to England. But if Quinebery's estimation is correct, statistically it's unlikely that their companion survived the summer.

English soldiers now began to desert the disease-infested camp at Villalpando, where John waited to receive word on terms for a truce from Juan Trastámara. He was forced to come to terms not only with his failure to take Castile but also with the huge loss of life. As soldiers packed up and left the camp, João angrily called them traitors, and John bowed his head and wept into his horse's mane.

Having failed to take Villalpando, let alone León, the remaining army retreated

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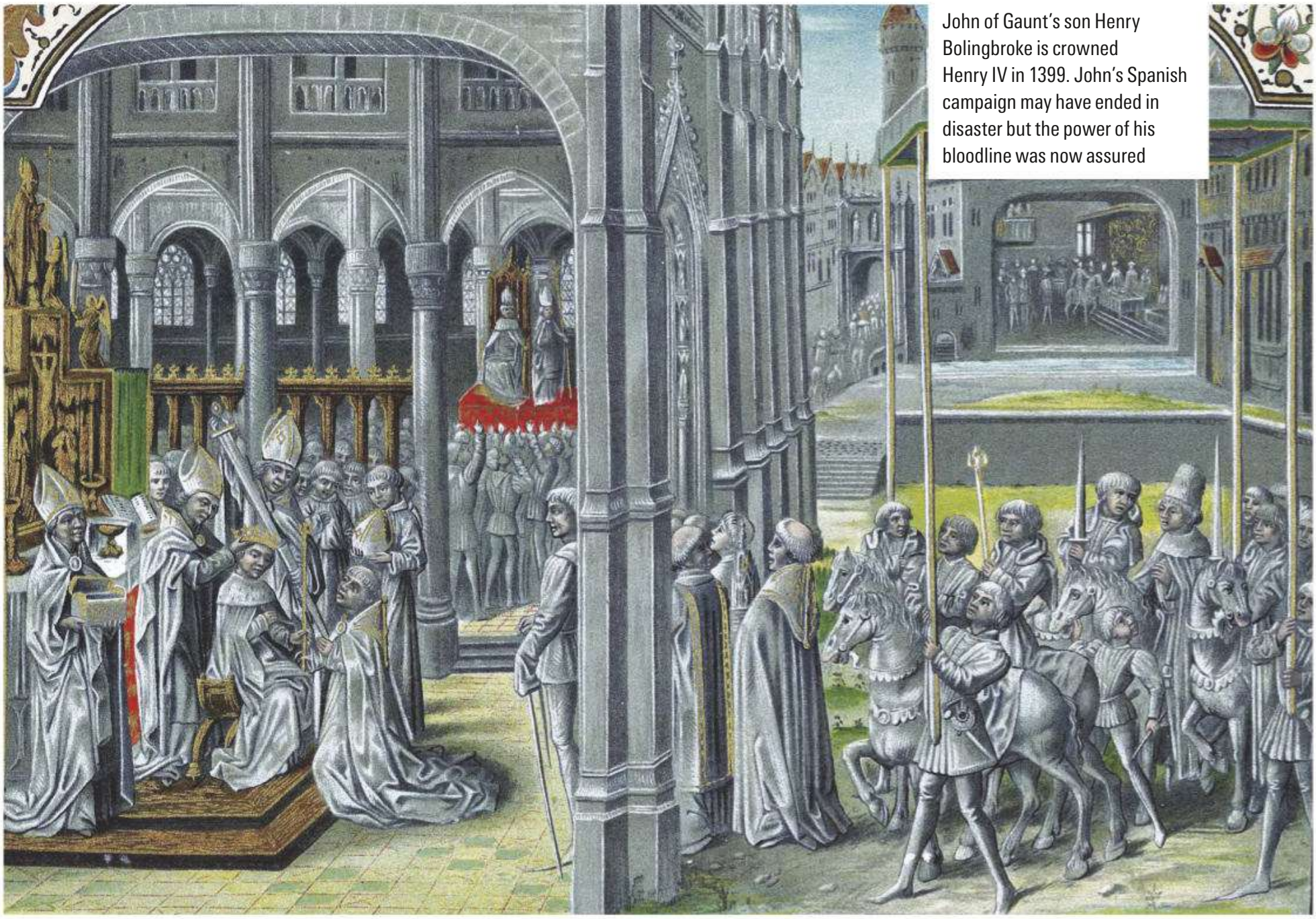

John of Gaunt's son Henry Bolingbroke is crowned Henry IV in 1399. John's Spanish campaign may have ended in disaster but the power of his bloodline was now assured

towards Portugal, camping outside the walls of Salamanca en route. Seeing the sorry state of the ravenous English men, French soldiers who occupied the city took pity on them, delivering cartloads of supplies to the camp. This offering was reciprocated with an invitation to the French, and a knight called Renaud de Roye brought 50 knights and squires to a joust arranged by the English. The Portuguese, meanwhile, were forced to scavenge birds' nests on the sides of the roads for sustenance.

A crown of gold

Back in Portugal in early June, John of Gaunt met the ambassadors of Juan Trastámara at the castle of Trancoso, and appointed Sir Thomas Percy to conduct peace negotiations. A key term was the marriage of Juan's son, the soon-to-be prince of Asturias, to Catherine of Lancaster, John's daughter. The marriage would guarantee succession to the throne of Castile, grafting John's bloodline onto the dynastic family tree of Spain. "Immense riches" were sent to John, including mules laden with crates of gold – payment for relinquishing his claim to Castile.

So a sorrowful John of Gaunt abandoned the goal he had pursued for 20 years. As a parting gesture, he arranged for the delivery of a personal gift to Juan Trastámara: the gleaming golden crown given by Richard II to John as he left England the previous year, full of ambition and hope.

John of Gaunt's great-great-granddaughter, Catherine of Aragon. The marriage of John's daughter to the prince of Asturias would have huge dynastic implications for England and Spain

Following the failure of his Castile campaign, John's interest in Spain waned. Returning to England in 1389, he promoted clemency and spent his final years as a peacemaker, playing a political long game amid Richard's volatile tyranny in an attempt to protect his family and legacy.

When John of Gaunt died at Leicester Castle in February 1399, his son, Henry Bolingbroke, was in exile and all seemed lost. Yet John's legacy *did* endure. Young Bolingbroke returned to claim the English throne as Henry IV. And John's daughter Catherine became queen consort and then regent of Castile. Through her arose the most famous alliance of the 16th century – the marriage between her great-granddaughter, Catherine of Aragon, and Henry VIII. The dynasty had come full circle.

Despite his failure in Castile, John of Gaunt became the father of long lines of famous monarchs in England and Spain – kings and queens who dominate the pages of history books to this day. H

Helen Carr is a historian, writer and documentary producer. Her new book is *The Red Prince: John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster* (Oneworld, April 2021)

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THE CHANGING SHAPE

Since they emerged in the 1940s, slimming clubs have provided emotional succour, drawn criticism from feminists and attempted to reinvent themselves as purveyors of wellness – all proof, writes **Katrina Moseley**, that there's a lot more to the history of dieting than weight loss

ILLUSTRATION BY **ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE**

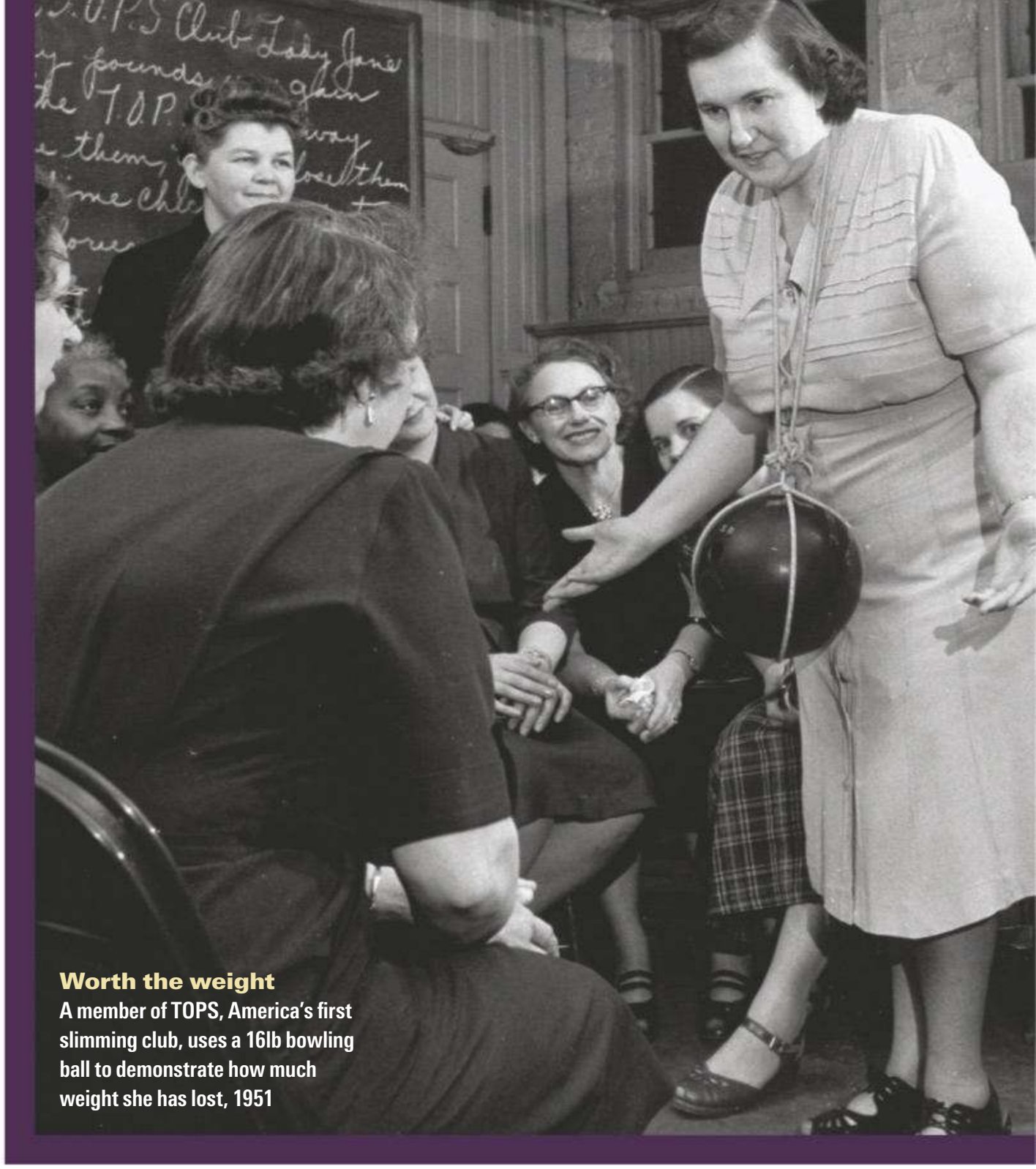
OF SLIMMING

Slimming clubs

On 16 September 1967, a local paper in Surrey ran a weight-loss story about a woman named Stephanie Vaughan. Having struggled with her body weight as a child and adolescent, Stephanie had grown "fatter and more hopeless about her weight problem until, at 21, she reached 14½ stone". She had tried everything in her willpower to diet. She had even taken a course of slimming pills, which left her feeling "terrible". But recently, reported the newspaper, something dramatic had happened. Stephanie had discovered a new slimming method called Weight Watchers: "an organisation, recently introduced to this country from America, which helps fatties through group therapy – a kind of 'eaters anonymous'."

The article in the *Surrey Comet* went on to record Stephanie's remarkable success with Weight Watchers. She had started going once a week to a meeting in a small village hall in Datchet, where a new branch of the company had just been formed. Although she had already slimmed down to 13 stone, she hoped to stay for five further months to lose more weight. The journalist concluded that Stephanie felt better in herself and found it easier to resist sweet temptations. Where once she had been a "fat girl", "too big to go out and buy pretty, off-the-peg clothing", she had started "taking an interest in fashions, now there is a chance of finding something to fit".

This newspaper story captures an important moment in the late 1960s, when new dieting methods were emerging in Britain. And although today we are very familiar with the idea of slimming clubs, their history is largely overlooked. How did the idea of "group-supported" weight loss first catch on?



Worth the weight
A member of TOPS, America's first slimming club, uses a 16lb bowling ball to demonstrate how much weight she has lost, 1951

Clubbing together

Slimming clubs have a long social history dating back to postwar America. The first of these groups, the non-profit organisation "Taking Off Pounds Sensibly", was established in Milwaukee in 1948, and similar companies followed in the 1950s. In 1963, a savvy businesswoman named Jean Nidetch established Weight Watchers Inc. in New York, charging members a weekly attendance fee for the guidance that she provided. This model proved wildly successful, and four years later, an American woman named Bernice Weston bought an exclusive franchise to operate Weight Watchers in Britain.

Weston's story is recorded colourfully in her autobiography, *A Weight Off My Mind*. Aged 27 in 1966, she stumbled upon a session of Weight Watchers while on holiday in Miami with her English husband. Having yo-yo dieted throughout her life, she vowed to give the group method a go. Although her first encounter was an unpromising one ("[We] actually arrived… clutching hamburgers dripping with ketchup and relish and drinking triple thick milk shakes"), her dedication soon melted away the unwanted pounds. She returned to England several months later to spread the word about Weight Watchers from her home in Surrey.

LIKE AVON AND TUPPERWARE, WEIGHT WATCHERS DREW ON ESTABLISHED NETWORKS OF FEMALE SOCIABILITY

Ahead of the curve
Bernice Weston in 1991. The founder of the British arm of Weight Watchers realised that slimming clubs were as much about emotional support as dieting

Nevertheless, success was not immediate. Weston struggled to drum up business at first, attracting just three women to her initial UK meeting in March 1967. In the autumn of that year, she organised a "fashion show" for former Weight Watchers at a department store in Kingston-upon-Thames. The models had all slimmed down with the support of the organisation, and Weston arranged to have "huge blow ups done of their 'before' pictures" for the purposes of promotion.

During this early phase, Weston trained each new "lecturer" herself. "Lecturers" were former members of Weight Watchers: women who had successfully lost weight on the programme and wanted to set up a new class in a nearby area. Once training was complete, these women called on friends to take part in their classes. Like other American imports

PREVIOUS PAGE: EILEEN FOWLER FITNESS CLASS – GETTY IMAGES /BODY POSITIVE – NIKE. ADVERTISING ARCHIVE/BRIDGEMAN/MARY EVANS.

Before and after
Weight Watchers founder Jean Nidetch pictured in 1967 with an image of herself pre-weight loss. Her model of charging slimmers a weekly attendance fee proved wildly successful

Get fit quick
The British TV fitness instructor Eileen Fowler leads an exercise class for busy housewives in 1956. The postwar period saw a surge in interest in women's fitness – and weight loss

IMAGES ON PREVIOUS PAGE SHOW (clockwise from top left) Eileen Fowler with a troupe of assistants, 1955; factory workers keeping fit, 1943; Weight Watchers slimmers, 1972; women's sportswear; a detail from a Weight Watchers advert, 1980s; women keeping fit on the BBC show *Mainly for Women*, 1957

BBC ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

such as Avon and Tupperware, Weight Watchers drew on established networks of female sociability and provided new, income-generating opportunities for women.

Over time, the success of Weight Watchers paved the way for the emergence of home-grown groups in Britain. Silhouette Slimming was established in Northamptonshire in 1968. And a year later, a woman named Margaret Bramwell established J&M Slimming World in a church hall in Derbyshire. By 1975 there were around 570 branches of Weight Watchers across the UK and more than a thousand different classes of Silhouette Slimming Club Ltd.

Pulling them in

By the early 1980s, the strength of the slimming-club industry was plain to see. Talking to researchers in that decade, one woman commented: "I recently had a market research job to find off the streets of Nottingham 10 women who had ever been members of a well-known slimming club and interview them. Impossible task? On the face of it, yes, to get 10 at random like that. It took me just three hours – I was amazed. At that rate I could have gone on pulling them in all day!"

The success of these clubs helped their female founders rise to prominence, too. Rosemary Conley, who left school at the age of 15 and entered secretarial work, found huge success with a chain of slimming clubs in Leicestershire in the early 1970s. By the late 1980s, she was living in an 18-room mansion in the countryside: all off the back of the slimming industry. By 1991, with book contracts and television deals, she was earning more than £1m a year.

We can add Conley to a long line of enterprising women – Helena Rubenstein, Madam CJ Walker, Elizabeth Arden and Anita Roddick – who harnessed the power of female consumption patterns across the 20th century to make large fortunes for themselves. Identifying a gap in the market for innovation, these women helped to transform the masculine face of entrepreneurial leadership for good.

One of the reasons why slimming clubs were so successful in this period is that they meant more to women than weight loss. Instead, they were spaces of female "homosociality", where friendships were formed and women could share their problems and secrets – rather like the pubs that men gathered in to drink and socialise across the early 20th century. In the early days, eager to protect these female-only spaces, some slimming clubs even went as far as to exclude men. Rosemary Conley recalled that her own classes were targeted at "women, absolutely women. And if men had wanted to come, you'd have said no."

Keep Fit classes were another space that fostered female friendships in this period, and they shared many similarities with slimming clubs. Formed into an association in 1956 by the exercise guru Eileen Fowler, they grew to prominence in the late 1950s, gaining publicity from Fowler's motivational appearances on BBC radio and television. A suggestion to insert "ladies" into the title of the Swindon Keep Fit branch was approved unanimously upon its founding in the mid-1960s.

Mate not plate

In the 1970s, all slimming clubs followed a simple business format. Each club generated revenue through monthly membership and weekly attendance fees. Classes took place in hired spaces, typically village halls, and in return for their money, members received a

mixture of dieting resources: tailored food plans, calorie information guides, a weekly "weigh-in" and the emotional support of fellow slimmers.

This last factor – emotional support – was crucial. According to Bernice Weston, slimming clubs were places where private problems were shared and unpackaged as a group: "We would discuss why we ate, and frequently we found that we were unhappy at home… All kinds of problems were revealed when a member confessed to cheating: perhaps a woman would admit she was facing a divorce or that a parent was dying, and as usual food became her only solace."

In the early days, Weston would even hand out fridge stickers saying things like "Who are you angry with?" explaining "when you are angry with someone, the first thing you do is go straight to the fridge". To protect against evening blowouts, another sign cautioned women to "reach for their mate, not their plate". Its tagline? "Make love, not midnight snacks."

Talking therapies

Though these examples may seem comical, the unique culture of slimming clubs could serve an important function for women. The *Slimnastics* classes founded in Richmond in the 1960s combined fitness and healthy eating advice with talking therapy. As one of the group's founding members, Diana Lamplugh, later explained, *Slimnastics* paired together women with similar personal problems: "This has happened for instance with two mothers whose babies died in cot deaths, another where, sadly, two elderly mothers share the horror of having their sons commit suicide." By encouraging open communication, these clubs pre-empted later cultural concerns with stress management and emotional well-being.

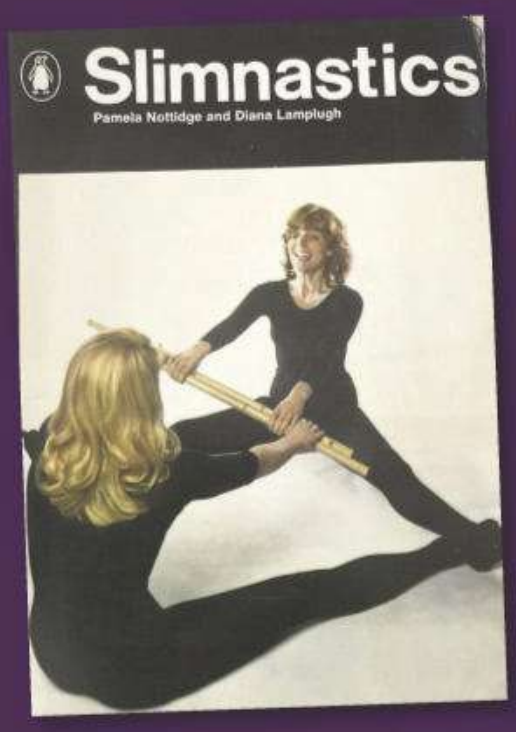
The reasons for attending a slimming club were not always this profound. Many women maintained a light-hearted attitude to participation, viewing their weekly meeting as a welcome opportunity to meet with friends, or to escape domestic drudgery.

Interviewed for a study on food in the early 1980s, a housewife from the north of England admitted that her own slimming club journey had been a farcical one: "Me and my friend used to go to the slimming club on a Thursday night with about 90p. We used to come out of there, go to the pub and have some fish and chips on the way home and slim the rest of the week!" This, she explained, was her "night out". It was something that she looked forward to because her husband always insisted on staying in.

At the other extreme, some women found the experience of attending a slimming club

At war with the patriarchy
In her 1978 book *Fat Is a Feminist Issue*, the psychoanalyst Susie Orbach (pictured) drew a straight line between "disordered eating" and patriarchal power structures. Soon, her misgivings about slimming were being championed in the feminist press

Pageant of shame?
Activists attempt to disrupt the Miss World beauty contest, London, 1970. By now, a new wave of feminists were railing at the objectification of the female body



Flexible advice
The Penguin handbook *Slimnastics* (1971) offered women advice on fitness and healthy eating

ALAMY/PA/PENGUIN

THE 1990S MARKED A NEW VISUAL AGE FOR SLIMMING, WITH THE SPREAD OF FITNESS VIDEOS AND THE RISE OF ONLINE DIET CLUBS

stressful and anxiety-inducing. In 1985, at the age of 21, Jackie Long joined a weight-loss club with friends in her local town of Congleton in Cheshire. When interviewed later in life, she recalled that meetings could be "a bit cringeworthy". The class leader "would actually go around the room, and she would ask everybody what they'd lost or maintained or put on… To the point where I can remember feeling quite sort of sick, hoping that I'd lost."

Although slimming clubs constructed weight loss as a positive process, aspects of the dieting experience could clearly be psychologically damaging. And the women's liberation movement provided a new framework for feminist women to express these concerns. Although the movement itself dated back to the late 1960s, critiques of the dieting industry found fuller expression towards the end of the 1970s, with the publication of Susie Orbach's book *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978).

This seminal book on dieting linked issues of disordered eating to patriarchal power structures. For Orbach, a British psychoanalyst, ideals of thinness were transmitted unconsciously to girls from an early age. Rather than reproducing such beauty ideals, it was the task of modern feminists to outroot them as part of a broader effort to combat the sexual objectification of the female body.

A recipe for outrage

By the early 1980s, these ideas had trickled down into the radical feminist press. *Trouble and Strife* magazine, launched in 1983, featured an article on the "politics of slimming" in its opening issue. "One thing sticks in my mind," observed the author. "[T]he description in *Slimmer* magazine of this year's Golden Slimmer of the Year who is transformed by her diet 'from a lump of lard in the corner into a winner'." The "hatred" (a word used in the article) of this description made her reel.

By the 1980s, the arguments of the American body positivity movement – which asserted that all people deserved to have a positive body image, regardless of societal expectation – were becoming evident in Britain. Nancy Roberts' exercise classes were launched in London in 1982, "aimed not at weight loss but at encouraging big women to enjoy their bodies", according to an article in 1983. And later in the decade, the London Fat Women's Group took to BBC television to create a programme that would "challenge the slim ideal presented by the media".

Many of the women involved in such groups had themselves attended slimming clubs in the past. "After years of dieting," observed the *Radio Times* in 1989, "they are trying to come to terms with how they are and want to challenge the oppression they face." Through activities of this kind, larger women shaped a more cynical view of the dieting industry through the 1990s and into the 21st century.

This brings us up to the present day. What do slimming clubs look like now, in the 2020s? The messages expounded by dieting clubs have of course changed shape over time, in line with broader cultural shifts. In the 1960s, there was a lot of talk of beauty, clothes-sizing and appearance. But nowadays, there is much more of an emphasis on health. This was reflected clearly in 2018, when Weight Watchers re-branded itself "WW", adopting the new tagline "Wellness that Works". And rather than being the sole preserve of women, men are now welcomed into slimming clubs – with more attending than ever before.

The techniques adopted by dieting clubs have also evolved in recent decades, owing to the rise of new technologies. The 1990s marked a new visual age for slimming, with the spread of fitness videos and television features. Then came the rise of the online diet club – a model that has proven particularly useful in recent months. Even prior to the pandemic, Slimming World had established an online platform for itself, allowing members to meet virtually and track their weight-loss journey through mobile apps.

Slimming clubs offer us a rich history of contradictions. Whether we side more with the arguments of the women's liberation movement, or more with the notion that "beauty is power" is perhaps a moot point. For all of these themes – body politics, sexual oppression, female agency, and female power – figure somewhere along the way. H

Katrina Moseley is a social historian of modern Britain. She received her doctorate from the University of Cambridge in 2020, specialising in the history of food and body weight. *@trina_moseley*

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INTERVIEW / JONATHAN DIMBLEBY

"When I was reading the detail of people's experiences, on both sides, I recoiled in horror"

JONATHAN DIMBLEBY speaks to Rob Attar about his new account of Operation Barbarossa, Nazi Germany's brutal, but ultimately doomed, campaign to destroy the Soviet Union in 1941

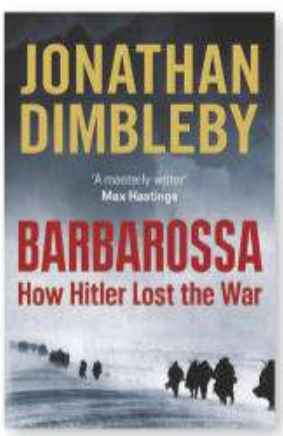
ROB ATTAR: The subtitle of your book is *How Hitler Lost the War*. Is it fair to say that these six months were the decisive episode of the entire conflict?

JONATHAN DIMBLEBY: When you look at what happened in Barbarossa and see how the situation was by the end of the year, it is inconceivable that Hitler could have prevailed against the Soviet Union. The Wehrmacht was very effective and efficient but it did not have sustainable resources to last a long struggle. Conversely, the Red Army was very weak at the start – not in terms of numbers but in terms of efficiency, readiness and capability. But by the end of the year, although it had suffered hugely and disproportionately, the Soviet Union was relatively stronger. And that gap was going to grow. Hitler, in my view – and I am not alone in this – lost the war in 1941.

How far back does the story begin? Can we see the origins of Barbarossa in the 1920s when Hitler was writing *Mein Kampf*?

I started the book thinking that I might be able to just go back a little way, to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. But then I found myself going back further and further out of curiosity, to understand it better. And I think that you have to start with the First World War in terms of the German situation and the rise of Hitler.

Mein Kampf made Hitler's views very clear: "I want *Lebensraum*, I want to destroy Judeo-Bolshevism, I want to eliminate the Jews from Europe by whatever means is most practical." Then in the case of the Soviet Union, you had a revolutionary state in the biggest country in Europe. These are the two great powers of Europe, and they either had to get on with one another or they were going to come into conflict, because of the ideological convictions of Hitler and the Soviet Union's need to preserve its identity, and secure itself from the multiple threats it saw all around.



Barbarossa: How Hitler Lost the War
by Jonathan Dimbleby
(Viking, 640 pages, £25)

So was the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact only a temporary reprieve?

I don't think there was any chance that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact could have lasted. Though both sides pretended in public that they would have everlasting amity, the truth is Hitler had already decided that he was going to invade. Stalin could not bear the prospect and wanted to postpone the conflict, while suspecting that it would be inevitable. It was only a matter of time and just needed a trigger for conflict to break out.

Was there anything Britain could have done to forestall Barbarossa?

It is the great historical conundrum. Britain went through the motions of trying to forge an alliance or partnership of some kind with the Soviet Union in the run-up to the Second World War. Indeed, in the summer of 1939, British negotiators were in Moscow at the same time as the Germans and Russians were in discussions. There was a bizarre set of dual negotiations going on, conducted on all sides in bad faith.

The British loathed the Bolsheviks, for very good reason. The Bolsheviks, Stalin specifically, had murderous characteristics and communism posed a threat to western capitalism. Neville Chamberlain, and most of those around him, thought – putting it crudely – "If we can get the Soviets into conflict with the Germans, we will be spared having to fight quite so hard to protect our interests in the world."

Had there been a greater readiness to yield to some of the Soviet demands that ultimately Stalin achieved, then there might have been a deal. The Soviet Union would, I think, have been ready. But the distrust on both sides was huge.

Barbarossa was launched on 22 June 1941. Was it a mistake not to have begun the invasion earlier?

The trigger for the breakdown in the Nazi-Soviet pact was the Balkans. The one thing that the Soviet Union would not give up was access to the Black Sea. But for the Nazis, the territory was crucial to possess and Hitler was not going to yield that. There was an extraordinarily ill-humoured meeting in December 1940 between Molotov and Hitler, at which the impasse became clear. Then the British became involved because they wanted to protect their Mediterranean and Middle Eastern interests. So in the early spring of 1941, Hitler sent troops, which had secretly been lining up to invade the Soviet Union, to the Balkans instead. He decided to destroy Yugoslavia, and drive the British out of Greece because he feared that the British would use that as a launchpad for an attack on the underbelly of the Third Reich.

The original plan had been to launch Barbarossa in May, but it was delayed by a month. There's much debate about how crucial that was. According to the Germans' timetable, even with that month's delay it should still have been possible to take Moscow before winter arrived. However, the timetable was itself wildly over-optimistic, as it hugely underestimated the strength of the Red Army.

Stalin was seemingly caught out by Barbarossa. How did he fail to heed the warnings of a German attack?

It's a very good question. It's inconceivable that he wouldn't have been aware there was a real threat. Warnings were coming to him from Japan, Germany, France and from the occupied German territories that something was afoot. And these voices got louder and louder. But he

PROFILE

Jonathan Dimbleby is a writer, historian and broadcaster who wrote the highly acclaimed Second World War histories *The Battle of the Atlantic* and *Destiny in the Desert: The Road to El Alamein*. His broadcasting career includes chairing BBC Radio 4's *Any Questions* for more than 30 years.

PORTRAIT TAKEN REMOTELY AT JONATHAN'S HOME BY FRAN MONKS

could not bear to contemplate the thought that he would be driven into a conflict with the Nazi war machine when the Red Army was not yet ready. So he chose to blind himself to the roaring noise of evidence, with catastrophic consequences.

Does this lack of preparedness explain the disastrous performance of the Red Army in the first few weeks?
It is one of the factors. The leadership was very demoralised. There had been the purges a few years earlier in which tens of thousands of senior officers were removed, meaning there was a lack of strong leadership and strategic organisation. The defences were in a weak position along the border: the troops were ill-trained and a lot of officers did not want to make decisions. Many of the weapons were in need of repairs or out of date.

So you had ill-trained, ill-prepared, demoralised troops in the wrong positions fighting a highly organised, highly-focussed three-pronged attack by 3.3 million men. And that's why the Blitzkrieg went at such a stunning pace to start with.

A Soviet propaganda poster shows their forces overwhelming Nazi invaders. Jonathan Dimbleby explains how hatred of the invaders was stoked up by Soviet media

At what point did things begin to go awry for the Wehrmacht?
You realise that something is wrong quite quickly. Even in early July, Franz Halder, the chief of staff of the army, was worrying about the strength of the Soviet resistance. Not their skills, not the quality of their weaponry, but their readiness to stand and fight, and not run, as the Germans had presumed would happen.

Ultimately the Wehrmacht was stopped outside Moscow. Why did the Germans fail to take the city? In your book you argue that the weather was not as important as we sometimes think.
After the war, a lot of Wehrmacht commanders wanted to blame the weather – General Mud, as they called it. The weather *was* atrocious. There was deep, glutinous mud that meant vehicles couldn't move. Then the cold came: -10, -20, -30 degrees centigrade, and the German soldiers were totally ill-equipped, because it had been assumed that the Soviet Union would collapse in weeks. The weather was bad but it was predictably bad. And the Red Army had to face the same conditions, although it was better equipped to do so.

At the same time, the Wehrmacht was running out of supplies and fuel. And the attack was faltering. They were also losing large numbers of lives. In that first six months of Barbarossa, the Germans lost almost as many men through death, imprisonment and wounding as the western Allies did in the whole war. Even though German losses were dwarfed by the scale of Soviet losses, this was still attrition that they couldn't withstand. Meanwhile, General Zhukov, the general on whom Stalin called whenever there was a crisis, had commandeered forces to protect Moscow on a scale that made capturing it extraordinarily difficult.

I don't think there was any chance that they could have taken Moscow at that time. They were broken. They were defeated as a fighting, aggressive force.

How integral was Stalin to the ultimate defeat of Barbarossa?
When the invasion took place he found it almost impossible to believe that it had happened. He became briefly catatonic, retreated to his dacha and it was as if he feared that he might be removed from power by his henchmen. But they were absolutely loyal to him and he bounced back. When he spoke publicly, Stalin rallied the nation brilliantly. He appealed not to communism, not to the party, not to any ideological vision, but to the nation that had produced Tolstoy and Tchaikovsky, the nation that had great writers and poets, and it was the Russian nation. And he called people friends. It's hard to exaggerate how powerful this was psychologically for the Soviet people – although many still thought they were going to their doom.

Stalin took command and he made dreadful errors, but the one thing he did was to pick Zhukov and one or two others and give them authority. He would sometimes dismiss them, he would sometimes contradict them, he would sometimes insist on enterprises that were self-defeating. But he was still a powerful figure in the fightback.

Something that comes through strongly in your book is the savagery of the fighting. Was that purely down to the mutual loathing of the regimes?
It was incomparably more terrible than anything that happened anywhere on the western front at any point in the war. When I was reading the detail of people's experiences, on both sides, I recoiled in horror at it and I've read quite a lot, one way or another. It was as hideous, as unspeakable, as barbaric, as brutal as any conflagration between two peoples en masse in war could ever be imagined.

On the German side I think it sprang from the fact they'd been taught, in significant measure, to regard the Slavic people, as well as the Jews, as being sub-human. This had been drilled into them for a long time. And because they saw their opponents as being more like "animals", they were perfectly happy to violate anything that would constitute rules of warfare – although there were some soldiers who were clearly appalled by it. The commanders who presided over this had belonged to the proud Prussian tradition of the German military, but even they had been infected by this virus of contempt.

On the Soviet side, there was a hatred that grew and grew, and was stoked up by articles and broadcasts about the Nazi beast, the fascist beast, the rats; they were encouraged to kill, kill and kill. And they killed and killed because there was no other option, from their point of view, if they were going to get rid of this invader. But they also committed appalling atrocities. It wasn't on the same scale as the Nazis by any means, because they were on the retreat for most of Barbarossa. But they did do some hideous things when they got hold of German soldiers.

> **"Stalin rallied the nation brilliantly. He appealed not to communism, not to the party, not to any ideological vision, but to the nation that had produced Tolstoy and Tchaikovsky"**

ALAMY

A village burns during the advance of the Wehrmacht in July 1941. The first few weeks of Barbarossa saw German forces make rapid advances, but even by August things were beginning to go awry for the Germans

AKG IMAGES

As you alluded to in that last answer, Barbarossa saw mass killings of Jews as the Wehrmacht advanced. How integral were these months to the development of the Holocaust?
People who haven't followed it closely sometimes think that the only element of the Holocaust was the death camps: Chełmno, Auschwitz-Birkenau, etc. And they were obviously critically important. But the Holocaust began in 1941, before the death camps were running properly, before the gas chambers had been built. A million or more Jews were killed in 1941.

Himmler, who was in charge of the SS, working with Heydrich, established the *Einsatzgruppen*, whose role was to go behind the lines, as the German armies advanced, and to isolate people who were Soviet Commissars, or subversives. That very rapidly became indistinguishable from killing Jews and by August, they were openly talking – boasting – about the numbers of Jews that they had killed.

The killing was done in an increasingly organised way. There are scores and scores of examples, but the most notorious was at Babi Yar, on the outskirts of Kiev, when the *Einsatzgruppen* rounded up very large numbers of Jews, and herded them to the edge of a ravine. They were required – and this is all documented by the killers themselves in detail, as well as by those few victims who survived – to take off their clothes, to put their belongings in one place. They were then marched up to the edge of the ravine and shot. They fell into the ravine, and the next lot came. This happened across the front, from the Baltic to the edge of the Balkans, and the *Einsatzgruppen* were often helped by local people.

The *Einsatzgruppen* were not drunks hauled off the street or drug addicts who had no mental capacity that would allow you to judge them. These were educated people who'd been doctors, who'd been through university, who were civil servants, who volunteered for this task. The depravity was beyond imagination.

The Wehrmacht high command tried to dissociate itself from any of this. They pretended, after the war, that they did not know about it. Not only did they know about it, it would have been impossible for them not to know about it as it was on such a scale. And they were complicit, if not actually participating themselves, in the killing grounds that the *Einsatzgruppen* occupied.

How important was the outcome of Barbarossa to Britain? And to what extent did British aid help sway the outcome?
There was British aid and US aid on lend-lease principles, but in 1941 it was of no consequence. It had started, but there was no significant weaponry coming in. Certainly by 1943 and 1944 it was valuable, but in 1941 it was irrelevant. The role of the British was to try to keep on side with Stalin and to prevent any possibility of the Soviet Union being defeated, or getting so close to defeat that Stalin would try to create another version of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Churchill was rather reluctant for resources to go to the Soviet Union because the British were under great pressure, too. Not only to protect the United Kingdom, which they still feared would face invasion if the Nazis beat the Soviet Union, but also the imperial interests, which were of huge importance to Churchill.

Once Barbarossa was under way and the United States was coming into the war, things began to change. Even before the end of 1941, Anthony Eden, the foreign secretary, went to Moscow and had a meeting with Stalin, from which he came back saying this was the time to negotiate eastern Europe's borders. It should be done while Britain was in a position of strength, not left until eastern Europe was controlled by Stalin.

I think this was a demonstration of immense foresight because, by the time Stalin was in control of eastern Europe, the western Allies didn't have a leg to stand on in negotiations over what kind of freedoms the people living there should have.

In the end, was Barbarossa always a fatal gamble or could Germany have defeated the Soviet Union?
With the benefit of hindsight, you can say it was doomed from the beginning, but no one at the time believed that. There is no doubt, however, that by the end of 1941 it *was* doomed and that Hitler had been beaten and broken by the Soviet Union, while the western Allies had played a secondary, supportive role. The turning point of the war, militarily, was December 1941. H

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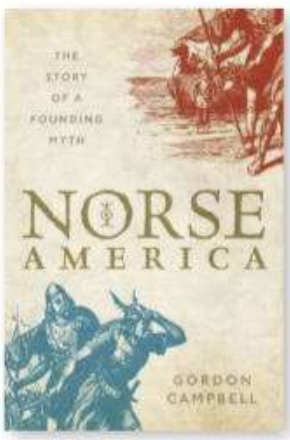

Norse America: The Story of a Founding Myth
by Gordon Campbell
OUP, 272 pages, £20

Around the year 1000, the Icelander Leif Eirikson set sail from Norway for Greenland. Encountering severe weather, he was blown off course and landed on an unknown shore farther to the west. Here he found wild grapes, wheat and plenty of trees. Leif named the new territory Vinland – and, so the story goes, became the first European to set foot in North America, five centuries before Christopher Columbus was credited with its discovery.

This well-known narrative about the western reach of the Vikings – the epitome of discovery and exploration – has been backed up by archaeological finds of a Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, seemingly offering irrefutable scientific proof. The story has become so entrenched in American history that the "discovery" is now commemorated with a federally observed holiday – Leif Eirikson Day.

Except this version of events is not quite true. It derives from two 13th-century Icelandic sagas, collectively known as the Vinland Sagas, describing voyages westward from Greenland by Eirik the Red and his son Leif Eirikson. The sagas detail geography, interactions with *skrælings* (the indigenous population) and, ultimately, the fate of the colonies established.

In the past few centuries, considerable efforts have been made to prove the sagas' historicity. However, in *Norse America* Graham Campbell makes it clear from the outset that the sagas must not be taken as historical accounts, tempting though it may be. As he puts it: "Eirik and Leif and their companions exist in the liminal space between fact and fiction." And it is precisely

this space that *Norse America* attempts to explore, revealing just how deep the roots of these legends run, and the sinister political motivations behind them.

Campbell begins by laying out the two major narratives of America's so called "discovery" by Europeans: that of Christopher Columbus and that of Leif Eirikson. As he aptly demonstrates, neither man really discovered anything at all. More importantly, Campbell provides the context for *why* these origin myths have permeated American national identity. They were, in fact, only two of many in a line of claims that suppress the indigenous Native Americans' legitimate stake in the continent's history.

Although the sagas were not widely known at the time, in the late 18th century the idea of a Norse discovery of America began to take hold. In the following century, artefacts seeming to prove this event began to appear; by apparent coincidence, these were often found in areas populated by recent Scandinavian immigrants. In 1874, Rasmus B Anderson – the son of Norwegian Midwestern migrants – published the book *America not Discovered by Columbus*, broadening public awareness of the idea and cementing a link between cultural elites in New England and their imagined ancestral Norse past.

Then, in 1893, a full scale replica of the recently discovered Gokstad ship from Norway, imaginatively named *Viking*, set sail for the US. Its destination was the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, an event launched to celebrate Columbus's arrival in the New World. *Viking* sailed into a blossoming process of nationalistic myth-making.

A key aim of *Norse America* is untangling the written sources and archaeological evidence for settlement of the western North Atlantic, including Greenland. This is crucial for our understanding of expansion farther west because of the Norse presence there from the late 10th century to the 15th century, when the Greenlandic settlements were abandoned. (The abandonment is a subject of debate, the main points of which are outlined in the book.)

Campbell continues with a summary of the discoveries at L'Anse aux Meadows, followed by a consideration of finds and investigations that may shed light on a Norse presence elsewhere in what is now the eastern Canadian Arctic. Pivotal in this are artefacts suggestive of contact between the Norse and the indigenous populations, many of which have prompted diverging interpretations – are they evidence for settlement, trade or other forms of prolonged contact?

The book's final section returns to the discovery myths, asking what happens when their proponents are faced with rather unsatisfactory proof – specifically, that evidence is fabricated. Campbell gives a lively presentation of artefacts, runestones, earthworks and even buildings that have been interpreted as irrefutable evidence of a Norse presence at various places in North America. Examples include the infamous Kensington runestone, allegedly documenting a 14th-century journey from Vinland to Minnesota that ended in a bloody massacre of the Northmen by unnamed indigenous enemies. Campbell unravels the social, political and religious context of the hoax, making it clear that Norse foundation myths are far from innocent imaginings by history enthusiasts,

"Runestones, earthworks and even buildings have been interpreted as irrefutable evidence of a Norse presence in North America"

but rather part of a set of ideological and racially charged claims.

It is in this type of contextualisation that *Norse America* excels in its commendable depth. Campbell's background as a Renaissance scholar shines through, though it might also distract readers primarily interested in the Viking Age. This is where my main criticism of the book lies: aiming to provide an up-to-date assessment of the archaeological evidence *and* consider the modern historical context of myth-making is an ambitious task. By his own admission, Campbell does not have an archaeological background; as an archaeologist, I found certain simplifications troubling, leading to a concern that some contentious issues may not be entirely balanced. I would also have liked to see the book acknowledge current worrying trends of white supremacists' appropriation of the Vinland concept.

Despite these reservations, *Norse America* is an important book that equips the reader to interrogate the stories we think we know, and asks how – and why – we arrived where we are today. This highly readable volume is particularly suited to those who want to understand how the past is shaped in the present – often for explicit political aims. H

Cat Jarman is the author of *River Kings: A New History of the Vikings from Scandinavia to the Silk Roads* (HarperCollins, 2021)

ANNIE DRESNER

AUTHORS ON THE PODCAST

Julia Laite on a trafficking scandal from 1910

"At the heart of this case is Lydia Harvey – a young woman who wanted more, and took a great risk to try to find it. She dreamed of travelling, and possibly even a life on the stage. She was really stepping outside those boundaries that her social class – and the time in which she lived – had set for her. That was a major risk she took, and it ended up being a very difficult and dangerous journey."

Jennifer Higgie on self-portraits by women

"One of the really interesting things about self-portraits is that all you need to paint yourself is a mirror and a palette. Throughout history, women were barred from art academies and life-drawing rooms, and weren't allowed to be apprentices. Because women artists were denied access to so many ways of learning their craft, they turned to themselves. This is why so many women in the past painted self-portraits – because they were the only model they had access to."

Sean McMeekin on Stalin and the Second World War

"However the war might have started, it became Stalin's war. He was the great victor in the end, in terms of territory and war booty seized, in terms of concrete gains and, in the more unpleasant sense, in terms of what we might call slave labour – massive numbers of prisoners of war incorporated into the Gulag and the Soviet forced economy."

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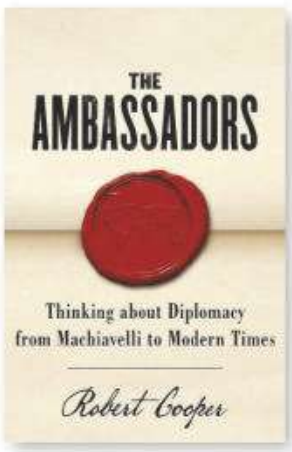
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Global go-betweens

CATHERINE FLETCHER is fascinated by a new history exploring the actions and motives of diplomats, and revealing the impact of their work on individuals and nations



The Ambassadors: Thinking About Diplomacy from Machiavelli to Modern Times
by Robert Cooper
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 576 pages, £25

This book is not primarily about ambassadors; its subtitle is a much better guide to the contents. Cooper's main interest lies at a higher level: in foreign ministers and their senior officials, and in how they think. He begins during the Italian Renaissance with a chapter on Machiavelli, then jumps forward to the French court and its ministers Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin. The bulk of his case studies, however, are taken from the 20th century, as the great statesmen of the west steer their way through wars both hot and cold. For readers who want to get inside the minds of the policymakers at the top of western diplomacy, this is a fascinating book, written by an author with ample personal experience on which to draw.

Cooper explains that he wants "to convey the drama of diplomacy", and there is certainly plenty of that in his tales of state-craft, whether concerning the Berlin block-ade or the Cuban missile crisis. His emphasis is firmly on Europe and the United States. The Soviet Union is present mainly as antagonist and, though we hear plenty from the memoirs of western diplomats, we don't get their eastern counterparts; nor is there much on the Global South. The focus, moreover, is on hard power rather than cultural exchange, though there are some wonderful anecdotes – for example, about the US ambassador to Moscow whose interpreter hired circus seals to perform party tricks.

The most intriguing sections of this book are those dealing with lesser-known histo-ries. A chapter is devoted to the diplomacy of Denmark with Nazi Germany, and of Finland with the Soviet Union, giving a fascinating insight into how small states operate within the world system. The final chapter picks up the stories of two consular officials who, despite their relatively low rank in the diplomatic pecking order, did more than most to save Jews from the Holocaust. Frank Foley issued visas from the British consulate in Berlin, while Chiune Sugihara, Japanese vice-consul in Lithuania, did the same to help refugees from occupied Europe cross the Soviet Union. Foley bent the rules to do so; Sugihara broke them. A scattering of others did the same but, as Cooper notes, these were "exceptional people". By and large, diplomats "followed the rules and their instructions".

Diplomatic mission
Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara (left) defied orders and issued visas that saved thousands of Jews in Lithuania, including Hanni Vogelweid (right) and her family, from the Nazis

> **"There are wonderful anecdotes – for example, the US ambassador to Moscow whose interpreter hired circus seals to perform party tricks"**

After the Second World War, questions of peace and reconstruction in Europe were taxing minds across the continent and beyond. Cooper explores how they were tackled through diplomacy, via initiatives such as the Marshall Plan and, later, the European Coal and Steel Community – a predecessor of the European Union.

"What has changed Europe," Cooper writes, "is the creation of a political commu-nity among its states who are in continuous communication and negotiation with each other. The EU, for all its faults, has altered the continent in ways that make it quite different from the Europe of 1914 or 1939." If this is in part a history of diplomacy and its actors, it is also a defence of the idea of a liberal world order that Cooper believes today is under challenge not only from Russia and China but also, in Britain, from the rise of populism. H

Catherine Fletcher is a historian and author. Her latest book is *The Beauty and the Terror* (Bodley Head, 2020)

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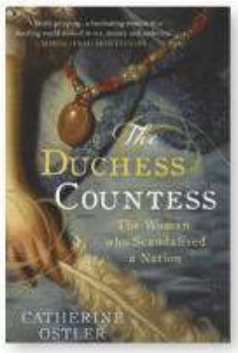
GEORGIAN

Scandal & seduction



The Duchess Countess
by Catherine Ostler
Simon & Schuster, 480 pages, £25

Few women navigated the Georgian court with the elan of Elizabeth Chudleigh – and perhaps none courted quite so much controversy. She played many roles: military orphan, much-admired beauty, scandalously under-dressed party guest and, most famously, bigamist. Papering over one youthful marriage before embarking on another at 48, she was ennobled as either Countess of Bristol or Duchess of Kingston, depending on which is considered legal.

In this sparkling gallivant through the 18th century, Catherine Ostler has done justice to a remarkable life. The information-drenched historical backdrop – of political schemes, distant wars and labyrinthine social networks – is perhaps not for the faint-hearted. On one hand, it provides entertaining anecdotes and endless lines of enquiry for the curious mind; on the other, it sometimes means Elizabeth shimmers with uncharacteristic subtlety centre-stage.

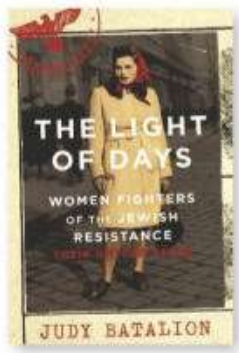
The real delight is in the intimate detail of the court. Ostler has her finger firmly on the pulse of the Georgian aristocracy, and has bracingly revived its extravagance and absurdity. She recounts practical jokes, illicit crushes, toothache cures involving a shotgun, and frivolous reconstructions of military conflicts with sugar and candied fruits. (Although the interesting suggestion, based on her impulsivity and spending, that Elizabeth lived with borderline personality disorder is perhaps a little weakened by this catalogue of excess.) The book also does an excellent job of shining a light on issues with thought-provoking modern relevance, highlighting the troubling power of the press and the glaring double standards that ground women to a halt while barely slowing down their brothers.

Like all the best heroines, Elizabeth is not flawless – by the standards of her time or our own. But in her ingenuity, her irrepressible spirit and what Ostler calls her "refusal to accept the prescribed limitations of female existence", she could be just the heroine we need right now. H

Emily Brand, historian and author of *The Fall of the House of Byron* (John Murray, 2020)

WW2

Fighting back



The Light of Days
by Judy Batalion
Virago, 576 pages, £20

When a group of Polish Jewish women witnessed the brutal murders of their families and friends, as well as the destruction of their communities, they decided to fight back. Forming a resistance group dubbed the "Ghetto girls", they inspired a generation of Poland's Jewish youth to actively resist the Nazis. Hoodwinking the SS squads with their seeming innocence and youth – some were as young as 16 – these women moved around Poland, bribing and assassinating Gestapo agents and SS officers. In the face of great personal risk, they smuggled guns and food into the ghettos of Warsaw and Lodz, engaged in armed combat in the forests around Vilna (now Vilnius), and smuggled Jews to safety in hidden underground bunkers.

Defiant to the end, their actions extended to the sabotage of German supply lines and hiding coded messages in the braids of their plaited hair. Alongside their Polish Jewish comrades, these women smuggled themselves in and out of the ghettos and supported the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943.

The brutality of the SS squads and Gestapo made Renia, one of the central characters, feel physically sick. She contemplated suicide but instead chose to survive and fight, making a pledge: "I will not ease the Germans' work with my own hands."

Judy Batalion's narrative draws the reader into this world as if we were eyewitnesses to the events described. These stories are driven by suspense and drama, and the steely nerves and bravery of the characters demand that we keep reading to find out their fate.

This is a powerful and haunting book, narrated with honesty and without elaboration by Batalion – herself a granddaughter of Holocaust survivors. It is one of the most important untold stories of the Holocaust. H

Helen Fry, author of *MI9: A History of the Secret Service for Escape and Evasion in World War Two* (Yale, 2020)

GETTY IMAGES

YOU RECOMMEND

We asked you to nominate the biographies that changed your opinion about historical figures...

@rescuedaugust
Marie Antoinette by Antonia Fraser. I went from thinking of her as a villain to seeing her as a misunderstood queen.

@Domandrewauthor
King of the North Wind by the amazing Claudia Gold – a really well-written and insightful book that provides a fantastic summary of who King Henry II was and how he worked.

@Svetka_in_Troy
Bettany Hughes' moving biography *Helen of Troy*. It inspired me to believe that, even if the literary Helen didn't exist, a powerful Spartan queen much like her probably did!

Richard James Keane
Napoleon the Great by Andrew Roberts convincingly portrays the subject as a great leader and reformer, and questions commonly held myths.

Ado Mohammed
Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar by Simon Sebag Montefiore. It shows that Stalin was indeed a tyrant but was also quite intelligent, had a brutally hard work ethic and lived frugally. And he was an equal opportunity tyrant: no one was safe from him, even those in his inner circle.

Ian Mason
Tracy Borman's biography of Thomas Cromwell (pictured) – it doesn't depict the kind and honest man portrayed by Hilary Mantel.

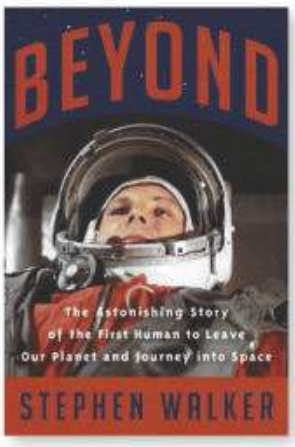
@DM_Vincenzo
Imprudent King: A New Life of Philip II by Geoffrey Parker. Parker was able to make him more human. Philip wasn't just a depressing, weird man living in El Escorial, but an art-loving figure who took his role as monarch extremely seriously.

Vicki Phipps
Washington: A Life by Ron Chernow. It showed that politics in the past could be just as nasty before the internet!

20TH CENTURY

To infinity and beyond

THOMAS ELLIS lauds a book that boldly goes deep into the origins of the space race, introducing the events, characters and rivalries that made the first Soviet space flight possible



Beyond: The Astonishing Story of the First Human to Leave our Planet and Journey into Space
by Stephen Walker
William Collins, 512 pages, £20

On the morning of 12 April 1961, a 27-year-old Soviet Air Force lieutenant stood on the threshold of immortality. As the cosmonaut aboard the Vostok 1 spacecraft, Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin would became the first person in history to orbit the Earth. During his 106-minute journey, he would fly higher and faster than anyone before him, only narrowly avoiding disaster. He returned to Earth a hero – living, breathing proof, according to Soviet propagandists, that communism was the future. Sixty years later, with crewed flights to and from the International Space Station barely making headlines, the heady days of the early space age seem as remote as a distant star.

Stephen Walker's engrossing new book thrillingly recaptures the danger and strangeness of the space race as it guides readers through the engineering struggles and Cold War rivalry that set Gagarin on his path to the stars. The author provides a fascinating glimpse into the inner world of the Soviet space programme, hidden from outsiders behind concentric walls of propaganda and secrecy. We follow the cosmonauts from the selection process, which whittled down 3,461 potential candidates to just 20, through a training programme that included punishingly long stints in isolation chambers to test psychological resilience, before arriving finally at Tyuratam, the colossal Soviet space port that rose from the steppe of Kazakhstan.

Early chapters cut between the American and Soviet space efforts. After the Soviets launched Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite, in 1957, outer space became an arena in which the superpowers vied to demonstrate their technological superiority.

Chapters on the Mercury Seven, the elite test pilots recruited to be America's first astronauts, will be familiar to anyone who has read Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff*. The cross-cutting approach evokes an atmosphere of frenzied Cold War competition and the vastly different worlds inhabited by Mercury Seven astronauts and "Vanguard Six" cosmonauts.

US astronauts were celebrities with lucrative publicity contracts. Soviet cosmonauts were anonymous before their flights. Astronauts lived in suburban splendour. Several cosmonauts initially found themselves billeted in a disused volleyball court.

> **"US astronauts were celebrities with lucrative publicity contracts. Soviet cosmonauts were anonymous before their flights"**

Astronauts tore through the streets of Florida's Cocoa Beach in sports cars. Cosmonauts stretched out their meagre salaries by taking the bus.

Walker has a keen eye for moments that humanise the cosmonauts, engineers, doctors and generals behind the Soviet space effort. By juxtaposing these fallible humans with the titanic technologies involved, he resurrects the wonder that space travel inspired – as well as the terror that bubbled beneath the surface in an endeavour where the slightest miscalculation could lead to a gruesome death.

Drawing on family correspondence, *Beyond*'s depiction of Gherman Titov, the second cosmonaut and Gagarin's understudy – a troubled Renaissance man who could perform gymnastics or recite Pushkin's poems with equal aplomb – is particularly touching. Gagarin himself, however, remains elusive, a blur at the centre of his own story. But though Walker fails to fully reveal the man behind the myth, he still succeeds in making Gagarin's story feel as astounding today as it must have been 60 years ago. H

Thomas Ellis is a teaching fellow in international history at LSE

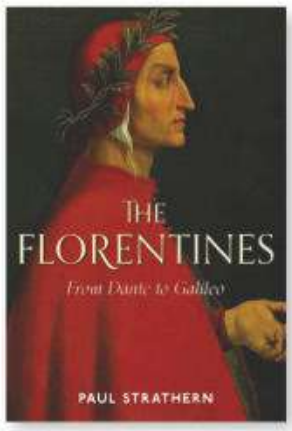
AKG-IMAGES

Rocket man Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, pictured on 12 April 1961, shortly before the launch of Vostok 1 – the first human space flight. Stephen Walker's new book delves behind the scenes of the Soviet space programme

ITALY

Florence's finest

FRANCESCO GUIDI-BRUSCOLI considers an evocative book that presents slices of life in the cradle of the Renaissance



The Florentines: From Dante to Galileo
by Paul Strathern
Atlantic, 384 pages, £20

Anniversaries always spark book publications, and this year marks 700 years since the death of Dante Alighieri, author of the *Divine Comedy* and father of the Italian vernacular. It is with Dante that Paul Strathern starts his latest work, *The Florentines: From Dante to Galileo*, which presents slices of the history of Florence by studying the life and work of its illustrious citizens across four centuries.

Florence, located some 60 miles from the sea, was not as cosmopolitan as port cities such as Venice: it attracted migrants, but mainly from the *contado* (countryside). And yet, during the period Strathern looks at here, it was open to ideas emanating from other countries and cultures. This openness contributed to making Florence the cradle of the Renaissance, where concepts from antiquity were developed and revised, pushing Europe forward from the Middle Ages into the early modern period.

Not all the characters portrayed in the book were Florentines in a strict sense, but most had a profound impact on the history of the city. The author stresses the importance of inter-personal relationships in a place where artists and politicians, geographers and merchants knew each other and learnt something from one another.

Each of the 19 chapters is dedicated to an individual or group of characters. The selection favours those with only a passing knowledge of the period, with detailed accounts of the famous few (notably the Medici and the trio of writers Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio). Conversely, it makes only passing mention of the less well-known, like the 15th-century humanists. Strathern keeps readers engaged throughout with a sprinkling of colourful anecdotes, often taken from contemporary (or slightly later) sources. The celebrated *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* by Vasari is ever-present, although, as Strathern admits, it is "not always reliable".

The four centuries covered by the book are not evenly balanced, with more than half of it devoted to the 1400s. With the *cinquecento* (the 1500s), the narrative accelerates and, after the politics of Machiavelli, only "the transcendent art" of Michelangelo bridges the beginning and end of the century, taking us to the final character: Galileo (1564–1642).

Most markedly in the first part of the book, Strathern's determination to educate his readers sometimes leads him into explanations that carry them away – both in space and time – from the core argument. Possibly this is the result of the "learning process" that the author himself experienced, because when he reaches more familiar ground – the Medici – the narrative flows more smoothly.

As an economic historian I particularly appreciated Strathern's decision to refrain from giving modern equivalents (in euros or pounds) of sums expressed in florins, preferring instead the much more methodologically sound approach of comparisons with contemporary prices and wages.

For those familiar with the immense academic and popular literature on Renaissance Florence, this book – while a good read – does not offer any novelty. But, for all that, those coming to the period for the first time will be able to sense the flavour of the social, political and cultural life that shaped a city that still attracts so many tourists. H

"This openness to ideas from other countries and cultures contributed to making Florence the cradle of the Renaissance"

Francesco Guidi-Bruscoli is associate professor of economic history at the University of Florence

FROM FACT TO FICTION

Deluge and dissent

Karen Maitland on *The Drowned City,* her new novel set amid a devastating Bristol flood

What was the Great Flood of 1607 and how has it inspired your novel?
In January 1607, a storm surge or tsunami swept up the Bristol Channel, killing 2,000 people. Travelling at about 38mph, the wave reached a height of around 7.5 metres (25 feet), surging inland as far as Glastonbury Tor. January 1606 had witnessed the brutal execution of the gunpowder plotters, including a Jesuit priest. I realised that the natural disaster, striking a year later, would have stirred up the cauldron, with some claiming it was God's retribution, others that vengeful Jesuits had conjured up the wave.

What happened in the aftermath of the flood in Bristol?
Homes and workshops in low-lying areas were destroyed, whereas buildings in streets on higher ground escaped. The honeycomb of cellars beneath Bristol, used to store goods and wine, was flooded. Water surging through tunnels under the city created sink-holes. People dug mud from streets, homes and businesses, along with animal and human corpses. Sunken ships blocked the waterways, but Bristolians still managed to pilot shallow boats in order to rescue people left clinging to rooftops and trees on the Severn marshes.

How does the gunpowder plot that preceded the flood tie into your story?
The surviving conspirators were arrested, but we know of one who escaped the net. Spero Pettingar apparently met with the plotters on 24 October 1605, but he is not actually known to have been one of the conspirators. Was he indeed a plotter – or was he an intelligencer who had infiltrated the group? The authorities knew that priests were being smuggled in and out of Bristol, so Pettingar might have also fled to the city – and my protagonist, Daniel Pursglove, is ordered there to find him.

The Drowned City
by KJ Maitland
Headline, 448 pages, £16.99

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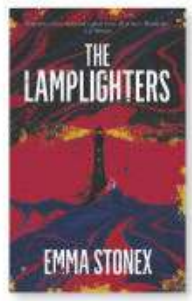
ALSO ON THE BOOKSHELF

WORDS BY **ELLIE CAWTHORNE** AND **MATT ELTON**

FICTION

The Lamplighters
by Emma Stonex
(Pan Macmillan, 368 pages, £14.99)

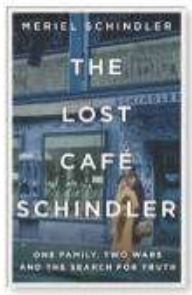


Vanishing act

In 1972, three lighthouse keepers vanish inexplicably from their post on the Cornish coast, leaving a clutch of confused and grieving loved ones behind. Emma Stonex's evocative novel is inspired by the disappearance of three men from a remote lighthouse in the Outer Hebrides in 1900. You can hear her discuss the book on our podcast at *historyextra.com/lamplighters-podcast*

MEMOIR

The Lost Café Schindler
by Meriel Schindler
(Hodder & Stoughton, 432 pages, £20)

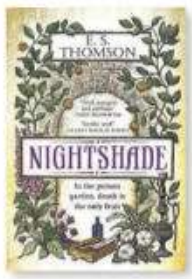


Family secrets

In this moving memoir, Meriel Schindler unpicks truth from fantasy in the tangle of stories related to her by an immensely unreliable narrator: her father, Kurt. Centred on the family business – the titular Café Schindler in Innsbruck – the story that emerges offers a deeply personal perspective on the often traumatic experiences of Austria's Jews in the early 20th century.

FICTION

Nightshade
by ES Thomson
(Constable, 368 pages, £18.99)

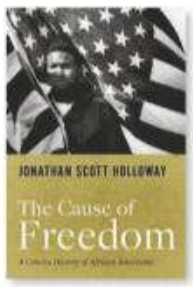


Poison & peril

When apothecary Jem Flockhart begins a redesign of her physic garden, she finds more than roots and worms under the earth. After digging up two skeletons from beneath her deadly nightshade, Jem is drawn into a dark case that played out 40 years earlier. This gothic Victorian mystery is the fifth in the Flockhart series from ES Thomson, a university lecturer by day and crime writer by night.

UNITED STATES

The Cause of Freedom: A Concise History of African Americans
by Jonathan Scott Holloway
(OUP, 160 pages, £14.99)

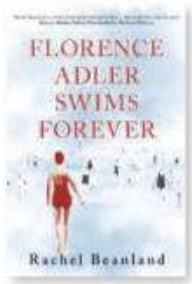


Fighting for rights

At just 160 pages, this is a very brief journey through 400 years of African-American history, taking us from slavery and the Civil War to civil rights and Black Lives Matter. Holloway – currently serving as president of Rutgers University – offers a considered introduction to these milestones and the figures who shaped them, grappling with thorny issues of American identity along the way.

FICTION

Florence Adler Swims Forever
by Rachel Beanland
(Simon & Schuster, 320 pages, £8.99)



Deep down

Setting personal strife against a backdrop of a world sliding into chaos, this novel follows a Jewish family and members of their social circle as they wrestle with a devastating secret. It's 1934 in Atlantic City, and Florence Adler is determined to swim across the English Channel; her sister, Fannie, is pregnant and suffering from high blood pressure. When tragedy strikes, nothing will ever be the same again.

WW2

The Spitfire Kids
by Alasdair Cross
(Headline, 368 pages, £20)

Young guns

Offering a welcome corrective to big-budget films that frequently cast actors in their thirties as Spitfire pilots, one of the key themes of this account is just how young some were – as were their counterparts who designed and built the aircraft. Based on last year's BBC World Service podcast *Spitfire: The People's Plane*, this is a lively look at an innovation that changed the course of the Second World War.

POLITICAL

Mussolini and the Eclipse of Italian Fascism: From Dictatorship to Populism
by RJB Bosworth
(Yale University Press, 352 pages, £25)

The ultimate authoritarian

Much attention has been paid to the populist politics of modern leaders such as Trump and Erdoğan, and one of the many interesting strands of this new book is whether Mussolini might reasonably be considered the first such populist. RJB Bosworth also suggests that it's the Italian Fascist, rather than Adolf Hitler, who provided the template for future dictatorships around the world.

WAR

The Shortest History of War
by Gwynne Dyer
(Old Street Publishing, 240 pages, £12.99)

Why we fight

It's always a brave author who aims to condense a historical subject down into a slim volume, let alone one as depressingly extensive as human conflict. This, however, isn't a military history in the strictest sense, but instead a look at war as a social, political and operational phenomenon recurring through time. From the first armies to clashes of drones and "dirty bombs", this is eye-opening, big-picture stuff. H

WATCH

Radical romantic

Nancy Mitford's deserved reputation as a wit and sharp-eyed chronicler of social mores rests in great part on *The Pursuit of Love* (1945), the first volume in a tragi-comic trilogy about British upper-class life. At its heart is fearless, headstrong Linda Radlett, a young woman who dreams of romance and adventure – and follows those dreams in the years leading up to the Second World War.

The novel has been adapted more than once for the screen, but that doesn't make a new version from writer and director Emily Mortimer any less welcome. "It's an outrageously funny and honest story," noted Mortimer when the series was first announced, adding that "wild, love-addicted" Radlett "still reads as a radical".

It falls to Lily James (*Downton Abbey, The Dig*) to bring Radlett to life. Emily Beecham (*Hail, Caesar!*) plays her best friend and cousin, Fanny Logan, who ultimately makes very different life choices as the two young women both search for the perfect husband.

In a drama filmed primarily around the cities of Bristol and Bath, a host of familiar names round out the cast, including Dominic West, Dolly Wells and, playing the prime part of eccentric Lord Merlin, Andrew Scott. Emily Mortimer herself plays Fanny's mother, also known as "The Bolter" on account of her serial romances.

The Pursuit of Love
BBC One / Coming soon

BBC PICTURES

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY: LISTEN / WATCH / TASTE

By **Jonathan Wright**, **Samantha Nott** and **Matt Elton**

Horsing around

The BBC's new adaptation of Nancy Mitford's classic 1945 novel *The Pursuit of Love* boasts a star-studded cast

WATCH

Painful memories

As BBC Radio 4's *The Reunion* has long proved, there's real power in listening to those who were there recalling their part in significant historical events. That's often especially true when people meet again those with whom they had lost touch: stories untold for years come tumbling out, and small details suddenly take on a new significance.

Such encounters lie at the heart of *Not Forgotten*, a new TV series presented by Anita Rani, whose work on documentaries exploring her family's sometimes tragic experiences during the partition of British India means that she has first-hand understanding of this emotional territory. In each episode, Rani joins someone who is looking back at what they went through, and searching for someone important to them at the time whom they have lost contact with.

Subjects covered in the series include the 7/7 terrorist attacks of 2005, when London was subject to a series of coordinated suicide attacks; the Aids crisis; the 1982 Falklands War; the Holocaust; and the almost-four-year conflict in Bosnia that followed the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

Each programme features investigative research and the perspectives of experts. The overall aim is to celebrate moments of kindness and humanity that can be found in even the most challenging of times.

Not Forgotten
BBC Two / April

A gravedigger works at the Lions Cemetery in Sarajevo for victims of the war in Bosnia. This is one of the tragedies covered in new BBC series *Not Forgotten*

Kate Winslet stars as the 19th-century palaeontologist Mary Anning in *Ammonite*, a new film from writer and director Francis Lee

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

WATCH

Pioneering palaeontologist

Today, Mary Anning (1799–1847) is acclaimed as one of the foremost scientists of her era, a fossil hunter of remarkable skill who discovered the first complete skeleton of a Plesiosaurus. But as a Dissenter woman working at a time when Anglican gentlemen dominated the scientific community, her own era didn't accord Anning quite the same respect, at least in terms of public recognition. In her later years, she suffered financial setbacks.

With dramatic licence to the fore, it's this later life that writer and director Francis Lee focuses on in his biopic *Ammonite*. It stars Kate Winslet as Anning and speculates that she may have had a love affair with geologist Charlotte Murchison (1788–1869), played by Saoirse Ronan. "After seeing queer history be routinely 'straightened' throughout culture, and given a historical figure where there is no evidence whatsoever of a heterosexual relationship, is it not permissible to view that person within another context?" Lee has commented.

The result is a tender drama blessed with terrific performances. It shows the Jurassic coast around Lyme Regis as glorious and yet also a place where, exposed to the elements, Anning's work would have involved morale-sapping physical challenges.

A second Anning drama, *Mary Anning and the Dinosaur Hunters*, is also due in April this year. It is written and directed by Sharon Sheehan, who has long been fascinated by Anning's life.

Ammonite
Available now via streaming services

MORE FROM US

Listen to Rebecca Wragg Sykes discuss Mary Anning on our **podcast**: *historyextra.com/podcast*

Leonie Elliott stars as Lucille Anderson in the BBC's phenomenally successful *Call the Midwife*, which returns in April with a slightly delayed tenth series

WATCH

Negotiating change

Following production delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, *Call the Midwife* is arriving rather later than its usual January slot. It's a welcome addition to the schedules whenever it appears, though, being both great fun and a show that probably doesn't get enough credit for tackling difficult issues, such as how communities deal with society-wide shifts in attitudes.

That's likely to be a theme at the core of the new series, which takes place in 1966. This was the year England won the World Cup and Harold Wilson led the Labour party to a landslide victory in a snap general election, a prelude to the liberalisation of laws around abortion, divorce and homosexuality.

The first episode finds Sister Julienne (Jenny Agutter) deciding whether to get involved with a private clinic venture that will raise much-needed funds for the sisters of Nonnatus House.

Call the Midwife
BBC One / Expected to air Sunday 18 April

BBC/GETTY IMAGES

WEEKLY TV & RADIO
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HISTORY ON THE AIRWAVES

"This documentary is trying to draw out the idea that history might be more complicated than we think"

Journalist **MICHAEL SEGALOV** tells us about a new BBC radio documentary that sees him journey into his family's Second World War history – and explore his connections to the Free City of Danzig

Your documentary tells a personal story about the lives of various members of your family in what was then the Free City of Danzig, now Gdansk in Poland, but which historically has been part of Germany too. What happened there between the two world wars?
Danzig was under the protection of the League of Nations, which to my mind always meant that people were somewhat protected from what was happening in Germany. Making this documentary, [however], I have come to realise the Nazis were in the majority in the local parliament from the early 1930s. My late grandfather, Oskar Dover, was born there and was forced to leave in 1937.

Why did Oskar and his family leave?
My great-grandfather was a merchant. The family story is that, on his journeys around Europe, he could see what was happening and made the decision they should leave. My great-grandfather went away on business and never came back. He made his way to Brussels. Meanwhile, my grandfather came home from school one day in December 1937, during the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, and was told: "We're going away." They left that night. But not everyone could afford to leave. One of the first concentration camps, Stutthof, was located close to Danzig.

You have been considering whether to apply for Polish or German citizenship. What was your grandfather's take on that idea?
He was always very reluctant about the prospect of me applying for another citizenship. It was only really right at the end of his life that he changed his mind. My grandfather's point of view, which I think makes total sense, is that he became British. Of all my grandparents, he was certainly the most traditional: he was very patriotic and served in the army. He was a doctor and involved in community organisations where he lived. But I'm certain there was a resentment, as you would totally expect considering what happened to the Jewish communities across Germany and Poland in the 1930s and 1940s.

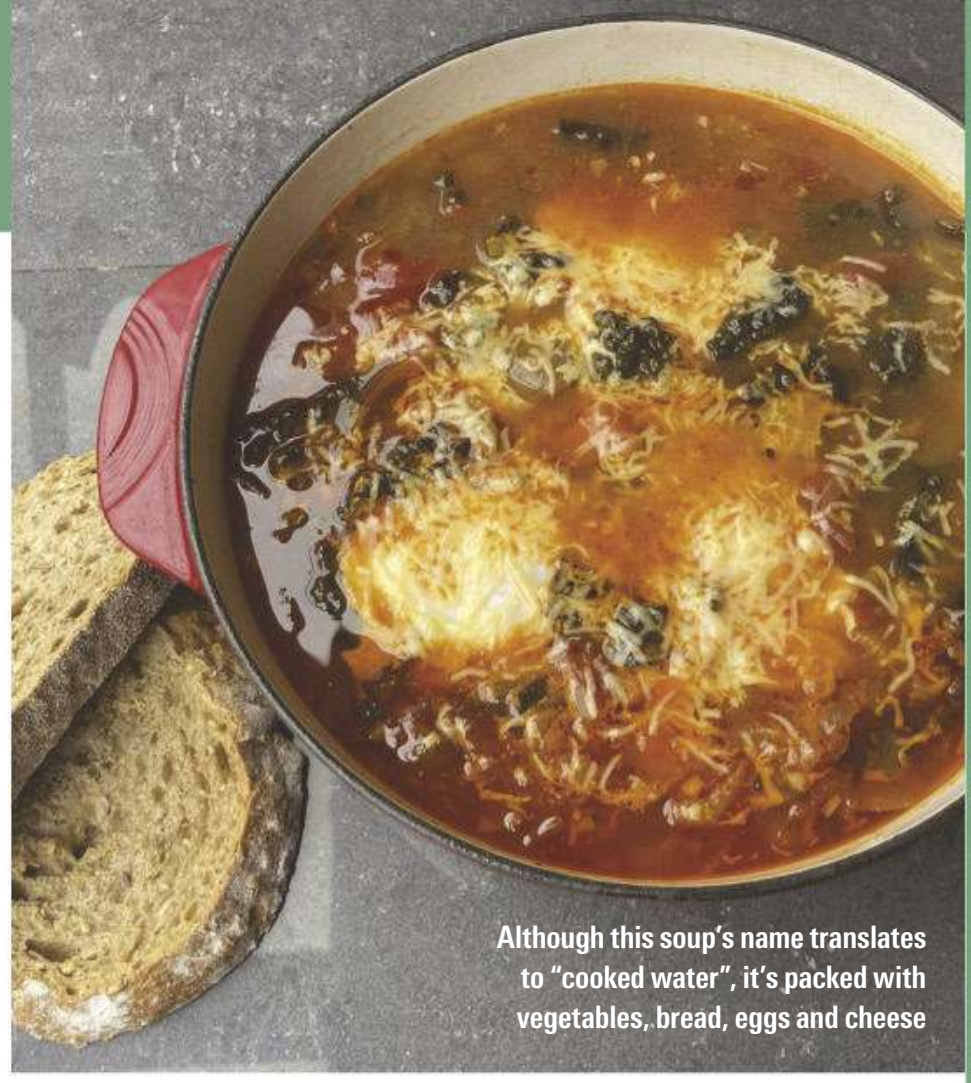
In Poland, there seems a reluctance to face up to what happened in the Holocaust.
Part of [the aim of] the documentary is trying to draw out the idea that history may be more complicated than we think. But, yes, Poland today is struggling to face up to the role it played in the Holocaust – and certainly the role that many of its citizens played. In 2018, for example, the country's president, Andrzej Duda, signed a "Holocaust Bill" making it illegal to say that Poland was complicit in Nazi war crimes. H

The Past Returns to Gdansk is set to be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on Monday 26 April

Stormtroopers march through Danzig, 1939. Michael Segalov's series explores his family links to this Second World War episode

TASTE

Acquacotta



Although this soup's name translates to "cooked water", it's packed with vegetables, bread, eggs and cheese

Some recipes don't go out of their way to advertise their deliciousness – and the title of this traditional Tuscan soup, which literally translates as "cooked water", does itself few favours. It originates from the Maremma region of central Italy and reflects the region's historical poverty – indeed, legend tells of a nomad being given shelter by a peasant woman and rewarding her kindness with a dish prepared, as if by magic, from meagre ingredients.

This updated version adds richness with eggs and cheese, producing an easy-to-prepare dish that can be left to simmer comfortingly away for a few hours.

Difficulty: 2/10
Cooking time: Three hours

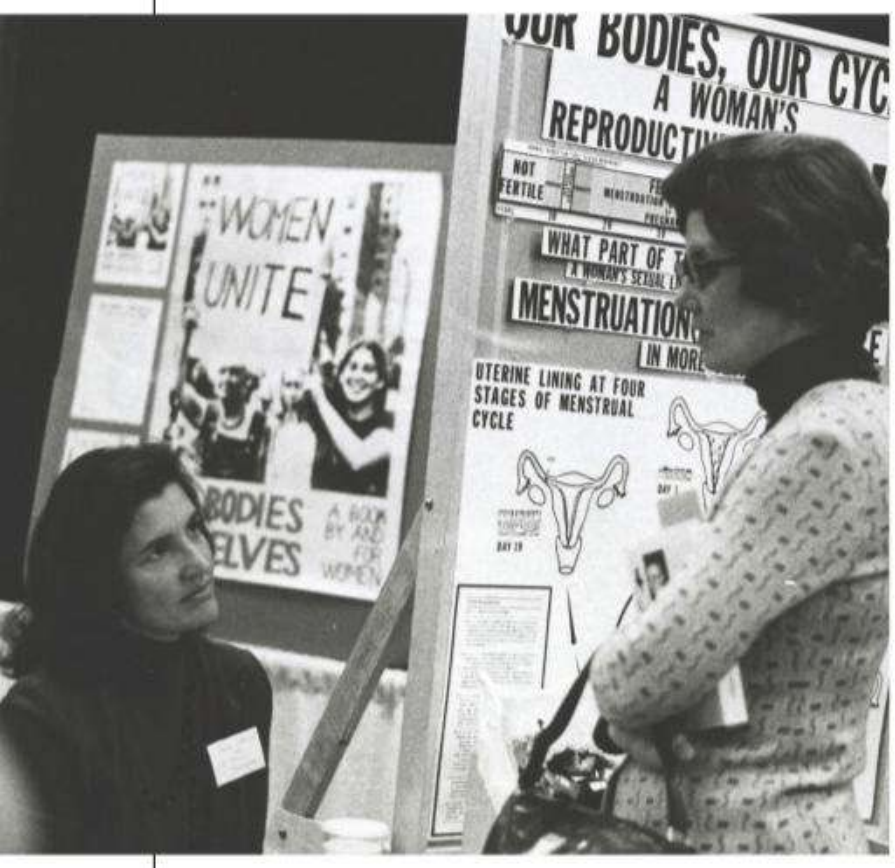
INGREDIENTS

Four tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
One clove of garlic, peeled and lightly crushed
Three stalks of celery, chopped
Two onions, chopped
One and a half tins of chopped tomatoes
Hot chilli pepper, to taste
A large pinch of salt
Two litres of water (plus optional vegetable stock)
Assorted vegetables – we used two carrots and eight large kale leaves
Eight slices of stale bread
Four eggs
Pecorino cheese, grated

METHOD

1. In a saucepan or large cast-iron pot, sauté the onions and the clove of garlic with the olive oil. Add the chilli pepper, tomatoes, any vegetables you wish to add and a good pinch of salt.
2. Leave to cook for a few minutes, stirring with a wooden spoon, before adding two litres of hot water (and the stock, to taste).
3. Cover and leave simmering for two and a half hours.
4. When the soup is almost ready, toast the slices of stale bread, rub them with a clove of garlic for a kick of flavour and tear them into pieces with your hands.
5. Distribute the bread at the bottom of four soup bowls.
6. Crack the eggs in the pot where the soup is still simmering, taking care not to break the yolk. As soon as the egg whites are firm, remove the eggs with a slotted spoon and keep them warm in a dish.
7. Distribute the soup into the soup bowls over the bread slices, put an egg in the centre of each bowl and season with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.
8. Top with a generous sprinkling of grated pecorino cheese and serve hot.

Recipe by Leite's Culinaria
leitesculinaria.com



An early 1970s exhibit booth for *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. This influential book about women's health is the subject of a new radio documentary

SAMANTHA NOTT/ BRIDGEMAN

LISTEN

Body positive

This year sees the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves.* Written by and for women, it was – and remains – a hugely influential book, dealing with topics such as sexual health, sexual orientation, birth control and abortion. In a new Archive on 4 documentary, airing on 24 April, journalist Laura Barton revisits this key feminist text as it reaches its half century.

Another anniversary being marked in the latest tranche of Archive on 4 programmes is 60 years since Yuri Gagarin became the first man to reach outer space. In *Challenge to Apollo* (available on BBC Sounds), Kevin Fong looks back at the Soviet space programme. Taking a similar format to the acclaimed BBC *13 Minutes to the Moon* podcast, the documentary draws on, among other sources, original mission recordings.

Further emphasising the range of Archive on 4, the programme on 1 May looks back four decades to the IRA's hunger strikes. On 1 March 1981, at HM Prison Maze in Northern Ireland, Bobby Sands refused food. On 5 May, Sands, who had been elected as an MP in an April by-election, died, one of 10 prisoners who starved themselves to death. Journalist and documentary-maker Peter Taylor, long a respected chronicler of the Troubles, examines the protest and its place in Sinn Féin's subsequent success at the ballot box. H

Archive on 4
BBC Radio 4 & BBC Sounds / Airing Saturdays

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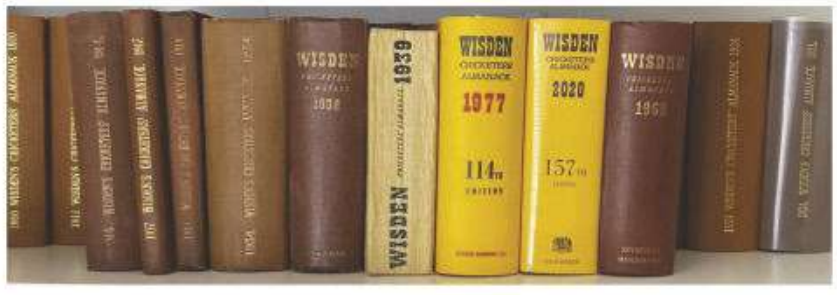

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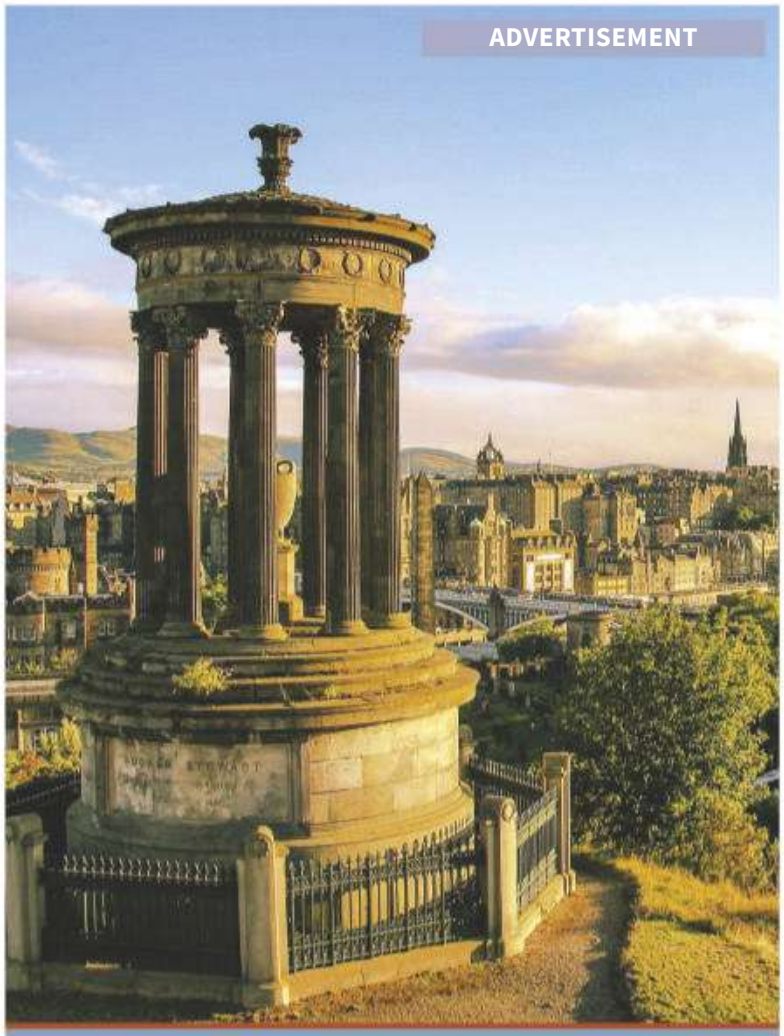

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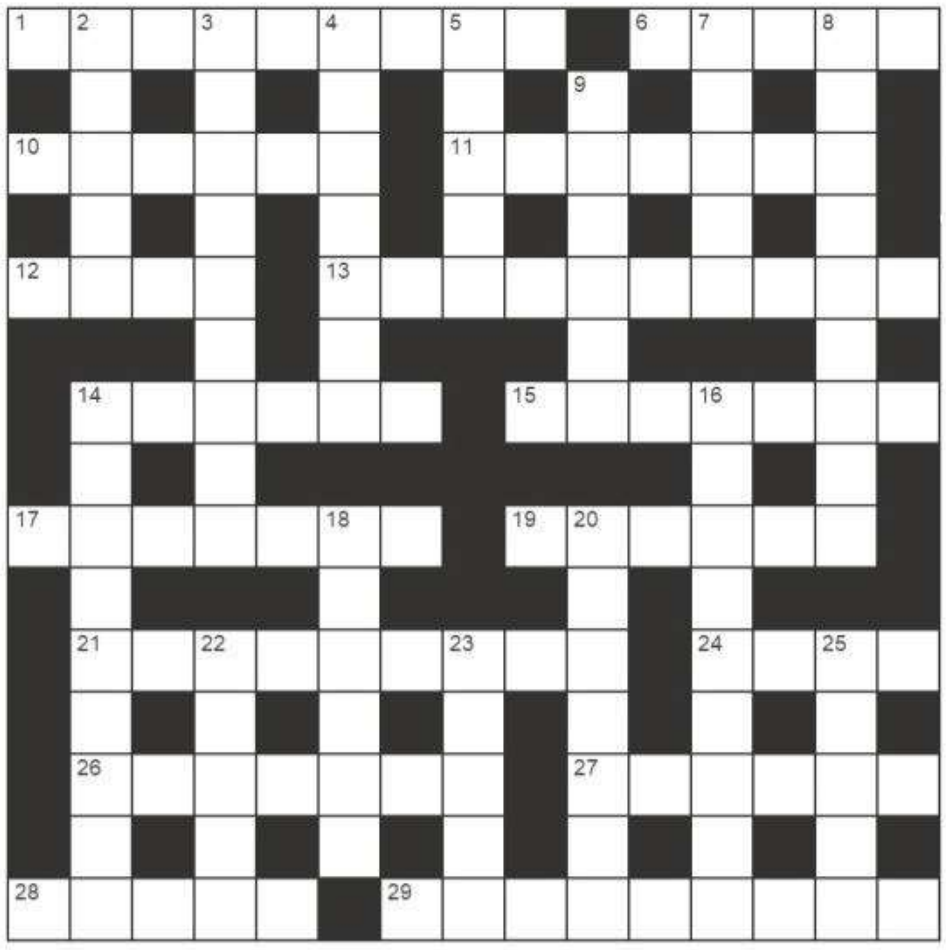
PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

1 Semi-legendary king of the Britons who enlisted the aid of Hengist and Horsa to protect his land against the Picts and Scots (9)
6 For example, the military one that seized power in Argentina in 1976 (5)
10 The statesman Pericles played a vital part in making this city the political and cultural centre of Greece (6)
11 A London club and a theatre were named after this 18th-century actor-manager (7)
12 Last name of the Russian-born American writer and philosopher who gained fame with her novel *The Fountainhead* (1943) (4)
13 British aviator, famous for her solo flight to Australia, who died on a 1941 mission for the Air Ministry (3,7)
14 British general best known for his ill-fated defence of Khartoum in 1885 (6)
15 In the Middle Ages, a state of bondage to a hereditary plot of land and to the landlord's will (7)
17/19 Jewelled seat of the Mughal emperors, studded with the Koh-i-Noor diamond and other precious items, looted in 1739 by the Persians (7,6)
21 ____I Poliorcetes ("Besieger"), king of Macedonia 294–288 BC (9)
24 An antiquated term for fortified wine (4)
26/7 Founded in the mid-19th century, this US company built the first transcontinental telegraph cable (7,5)
27 The marriage of Ferdinand II of ____ to Isabella I of Castile helped unite 15th-century Spain (6)
28 The Roman and Romanesque monuments of this French city were given Unesco World Heritage status in 1981 (5)
29 Historic region of the Middle East encompassing many sites sacred to Jews, Muslims and Christians alike (9)

Down

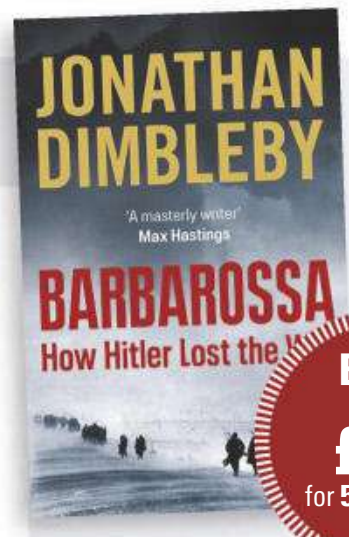
2 Port of ancient Rome, which declined as its harbour silted up (5)
3 Ostrogoth king who made himself king of Italy in 493, with his capital in Ravenna (9)
4 Göring's (later, Himmler's) Nazi political police force (7)
5 British school founded in 1567, the setting for *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (5)
7 See 26 across
8 Nickname given to the Japanese broadcaster (actually several different women) of propaganda to Allied troops in the Second World War (5,4)
9 In Louisiana, a French-speaking descendant of early French or Spanish settlers (6)
14 Anglicised surname of the hero of the ill-fated 14th/15th-century Welsh rebellion against England (9)



16 Fourteenth-century French poet and court historian whose *Chronicles* are an important record of feudal Europe (9)
18 Traditionally, someone who made dining utensils (derived from Latin for "knife") (6)
20 A famous example of which is Patty Hearst, kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974 (7)
22 ____ Dayan, 20th-century Israeli general and statesman known for his hallmark eye patch (5)
23 In classical times, a coastal region of Anatolia, bordered by Aeolis and Caria (5)
25 An old British coin worth five shillings (5)

Compiled by **Eddie James**

What is the surname of this American writer and philosopher? *(see 12 across)*



Book worth **£25** for **5 winners**

Barbarossa
How Hitler Lost the War
By Jonathan Dimbleby

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 aimed to crush the Soviets – but instead brought the Third Reich to its knees. Drawing on previously unseen archive material, Jonathan Dimbleby chronicles Operation Barbarossa, from its origins to its dramatic conclusion.
Read our interview with the author on page 78

HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to ***BBC History Magazine*, May 2021 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA** or email them to ***may2021@historycomps.co.uk*** by 5pm on **12 May 2021**. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the July 2021 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at *immediatemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy/privacy/* ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ❑ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: *bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct*

Solution to our March 2021 crossword

Across 7 Corinth 8 Jubilee 9 Stephenson 11 Zog 12 Waldheim 13 Alfred 15 Mother Jones 19 Abwehr 20 Mercator 22 Aram 24 HMS *Victory* 25 Hazlitt 26 Melrose
Down 1 Pontiac 2 Hippodrome 3 St Bede 4 Juan Cano 5 Diaz 6 Leagues 10 Semiramis 14 Freya Stark 16 Hirohito 17 Aberfan 18 Moorish 21 Reiver 23 Mill

Five winners of *Queens of Jerusalem*:
A Smith, Essex; A Bowditch, Cornwall; B Wyman, Surrey; J Harrison, Abertawe; M Payne, Channel Islands

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ALAMY

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A selection of the exciting content on our website **historyextra.com**

Rethinking the Second Reich

On the 150th anniversary of the creation of the first German nation-state in 1871 (the Second Reich), historian Katja Hoyer explores the nature of this regime – neither full democracy nor dictatorship – and its complex legacy.
historyextra.com/second-reich

Hunting down false facts

False information and images about the past can now spread more quickly than ever before. We caught up with Jo Hedwig Teeuwisse, social media's Fake History Hunter, who explains more about the rise of "fake" history and how to spot it.
historyextra.com/fake-history-hunter

Mary Seacole

For her work during the Crimean War, Mary Seacole has found lasting fame and is now considered one of the greatest black Britons. Jane Robinson describes how Seacole became a Victorian celebrity, and why she and Florence Nightingale didn't get on – despite wanting the same thing.
historyextra.com/mary-seacole

HistoryExtra newsletters

We've recently launched a number of themed newsletters bringing you the latest developments in some of the most popular periods of the past. So whether it's ancient, medieval, Tudor or Victorian history that most piques your interest, sign up to receive a fortnightly update of historical news, as well as the new articles, podcasts and videos available on our website.
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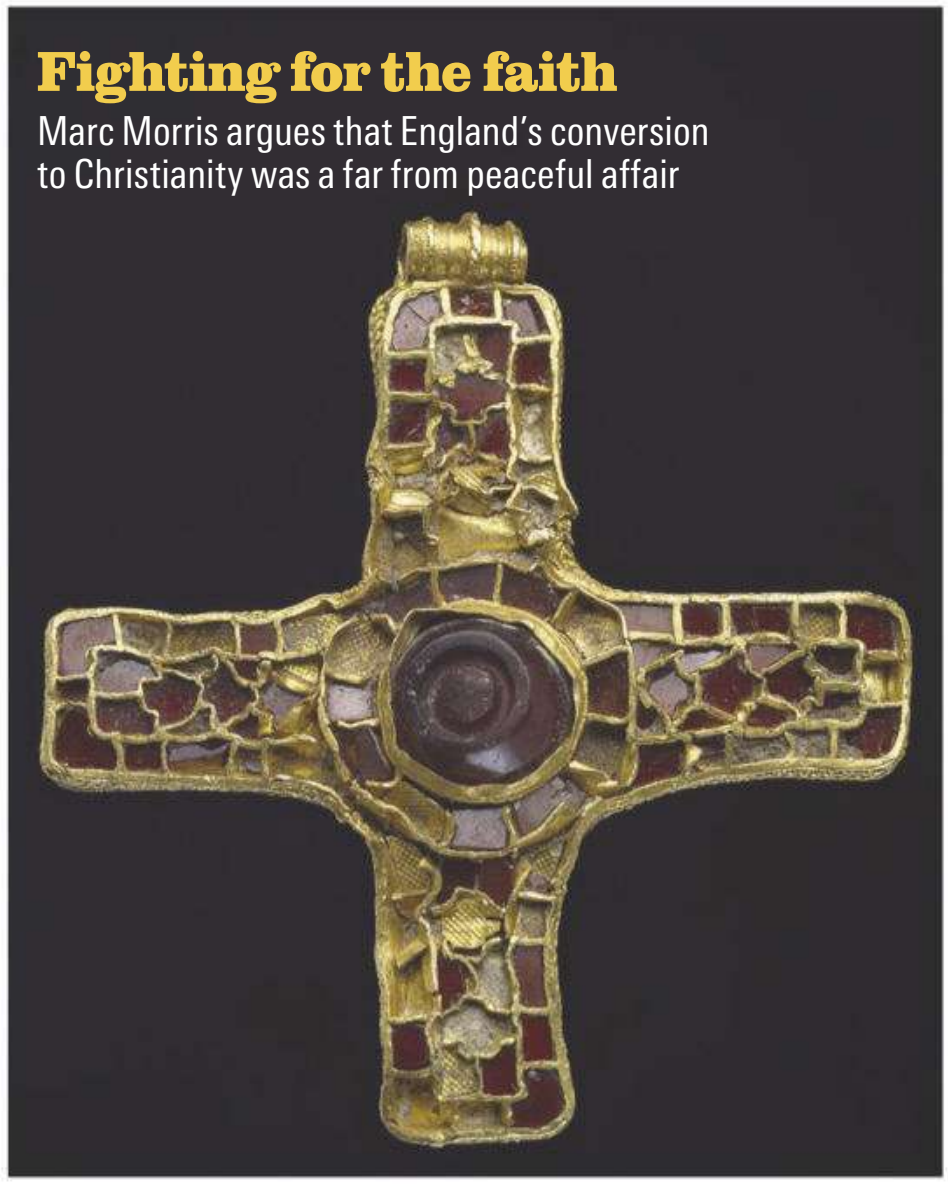
NEXT MONTH

June issue on sale 13 May 2021



Fighting for the faith

Marc Morris argues that England's conversion to Christianity was a far from peaceful affair

The Aids crisis

Janet Weston explores the devastating consequences of HIV/Aids as it tore through Britain in the 1980s

Britain's motor city

Steve Humphries chronicles the dramatic rise and fall of Coventry's car industry

Medieval romances

Lydia Zeldenrust on how tales of lords and ladies became bestsellers in the Middle Ages

MY HISTORY HERO

Anita Anand, broadcaster and author, chooses

Emily Hobhouse

1860–1926

Welfare campaigner Emily Hobhouse, pictured in 1895. Anita Anand lauds her strength of purpose: "Her life could have been easier, but she chose the difficult path"

IN PROFILE

Emily Hobhouse was a welfare campaigner, feminist and pacifist best known for exposing the terrible conditions in the concentration camps in which Boer civilians were incarcerated by the British during the Second Boer War. Born in Cornwall but granted honorary South African citizenship for her humanitarian work in that country, Hobhouse later protested against the First World War. After her death in London, aged 66, her ashes were interred in the National Women's Monument in South Africa.

> "Her revelations prompted the creation of a parliamentary commission to investigate the shocking conditions in the camps"

Anita Anand is an author and broadcaster, who presents the BBC Radio 4 programme *Any Answers?* Her latest book is *The Patient Assassin* (Simon & Schuster, 2019)

When did you first hear about Emily Hobhouse? About 15 years ago, while researching my first book, about the Sikh princess Sophia Duleep Singh. Like Sophia, Emily believed in women's suffrage – and, also like her, she lacked the disposition of the real scrappers in the movement. But Emily, too, learned to become a warrior, fighting for causes that were good and right.

What kind of woman was she? A mousy Cornish lass, she was just 20 when her mother died; she spent the next 14 years caring for her father, who was in poor health. Her awakening as a social justice campaigner came when she saw poor Cornish lads being shipped off to fight in the Boer War. She knew they were malnourished, not fit enough to be soldiers. Emily could not ignore her concerns. Her life could have been easier, but she chose the difficult path.

What made Hobhouse a hero? Travelling to South Africa in 1900 to help Boer women and children displaced by the war, she found herself up against the most testosterone-fuelled people – men such as Lord Kitchener, a frightening man with an even more frightening moustache. She chose to defy these men, even though she knew public opinion would be with them, not her; most people in Britain didn't even believe the concentration camps existed. She struggled to get permission to visit the camps, but she refused to be intimidated by the British authorities, and visited them anyway.

What was her finest hour? Smuggling photographs and documentation out of the camps, exposing the true scale of the atrocities being committed by the British against Boer civilians – thousands of women and children died under the British flag. Her revelations prompted the creation of a parliamentary commission to investigate the shocking conditions, which sparked worldwide outrage. She's been rather forgotten in her homeland, which is a shame. I'd like to see a statue of her put on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, or perhaps even in Parliament Square.

Is there anything you don't admire about her? No – I'd be very happy to hang out with Emily!

Can you see any parallels between her life and yours? I haven't had my feet held to the fire like her but I'd like to think that, like Emily, I know the difference between right and wrong – and would be willing to fight for what's right.

What would you ask Emily if you could meet her? I would love to know how she sneaked out those documents, and how she had the nerve to do it. I'm sure it would be an extraordinary story. H

Anita Anand was talking to York Membery

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